

**THE ECCENTRIC VICAR OF EVERTON:  
JOHN BERRIDGE, THE CAMBRIDGESHIRE REVIVAL,  
AND THE LIFE OF PASTORAL MINISTRY**

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**DAVID T. WOOD**

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***To Karen, Matthew, Hannah, and Rachel***

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## PREFACE

This study is a product of a long-term fascination I have had with the rise of the Evangelical movement on both sides of the Atlantic in the eighteenth-century. Regent College's Bruce Hindmarsh has argued that evangelicalism is best understood not in ecclesiastical terms or even theological terms, but rather as a form of *spirituality*.<sup>1</sup> With its fourfold emphasis on the Bible as the Word of God, the centrality of the Cross, the need for conversion, and the call to mission, early evangelicalism served to spiritually reinvigorate a moribund post-Reformational tradition. One expression of this reinvigoration was a rediscovery of the importance of *lived-out faith* or to put it in the language of the period, a rediscovery of a "lively experience of faith". In evangelicalism, the combination of Reformational doctrine and a concomitant emphasis on experience created a highly energetic movement whose impact is still being felt globally today.<sup>2</sup>

Early evangelicalism emerged out of revival. In North America, this revival was known as the Great Awakening, in Britain, it has been labelled, The Evangelical Revival. Beginning in the mid-1730s, revival figured significantly in the rise of the evangelical movement and has remained part of the movement throughout the nineteenth-century right through the twentieth-century.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Hindmarsh, "'I am a sort of Middle-Man': The Politically Correct Evangelicalism of John Newton" in George A. Rawlyk and Mark A. Noll, eds., *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada and the United States* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 29-55.

<sup>2</sup> See David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 1-17. For the connection between evangelicalism and global Pentecostalism, see David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: the explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Edinburgh: Blackwell Publishing, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> See Collin Hansen and John Woodbridge, *A God-Sized Vision: Revival Stories that Stretch and Stir* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2010).

Standing in the midst of these revivals, however, were ordinary pastors. Two pastors whose lives have always fascinated me and whose lives I had studied while attending Regent College, Vancouver, BC have been John Newton (1725-1807) and Henry Venn (1724-1797). In their correspondence, I had also frequently come across the name of John Berridge (1716-1793) and learned of this pastor's shared friendship with the two men. Reading Berridge's epitaph only added to an ever-increasing curiosity to know more about this pastor. I was struck by the honesty of Berridge who described how he pastored for six years before coming to faith! How could this happen? What effect did his conversion have upon his practical day-to-day pastoring? Even more intriguing was the revival that broke out shortly after his conversion. Were the two events related? If so, how? How did Berridge pastor in the midst of a revival? Perhaps the most intriguing element of Berridge's life was his willingness to remain a rural pastor after the extraordinary events of the Cambridgeshire Revival. How does one pastor faithfully on the other side of a revival? If these questions did not capture my attention enough, there also was the fact that John Berridge of Everton remains one of the most interesting and eccentric personalities of the eighteenth-century.

Having personally lived out the calling as pastor for 12 years, I have always been fascinated by the lives of pastors who lived before me especially those who ministered during turbulent times. What would it be like to pastor in the midst of a revival? How could one continue to minister after experiencing the extraordinary phenomena associated with revivals? What are the ingredients to a sustained life in ministry? These

are some of the questions that my research on John Berridge have helped me to personally wrestle with.

I am deeply concerned, however, with seeing so many young pastors today giving up the call to minister and choosing to walk away from the pastorate. Again, I will argue that learning from the life and ministry of John Berridge can be of some help here. Berridge's experience offers much that can help pastors maintain an evangelical vision throughout their ministry. Further, Berridge's spirituality can teach us how to love the Lord deeply and fervently even when one experiences difficulty. Most importantly, Berridge's life and example can teach pastors how to have a sustained ministry, and to faithfully serve Jesus Christ all of one's days.

There have been many people who have been of immeasurable help in carrying out this project. I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to Dr. Don Lewis, Dr. Bruce Hindmarsh, and Bill Reimer at Regent College for cultivating in me a love for the eighteenth-century evangelicals. Also, I would like to thank Dr. Garth Rosell and Dr. Bob Mayer for their mentorship and encouragement during my Doctor of Ministry at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Sincere gratitude also needs to go to the Elders and Staff at Coquitlam Alliance Church where I currently serve, Peter Cheung, Sumi Kinoshita, and my mom and dad, Tom and Donna Wood. The greatest appreciation, gratitude, and love need to go towards my loving wife, Karen, and my three wonderful children, Matthew, Hannah, and Rachel, who gave me all the necessary space and time to finish this labour of love.

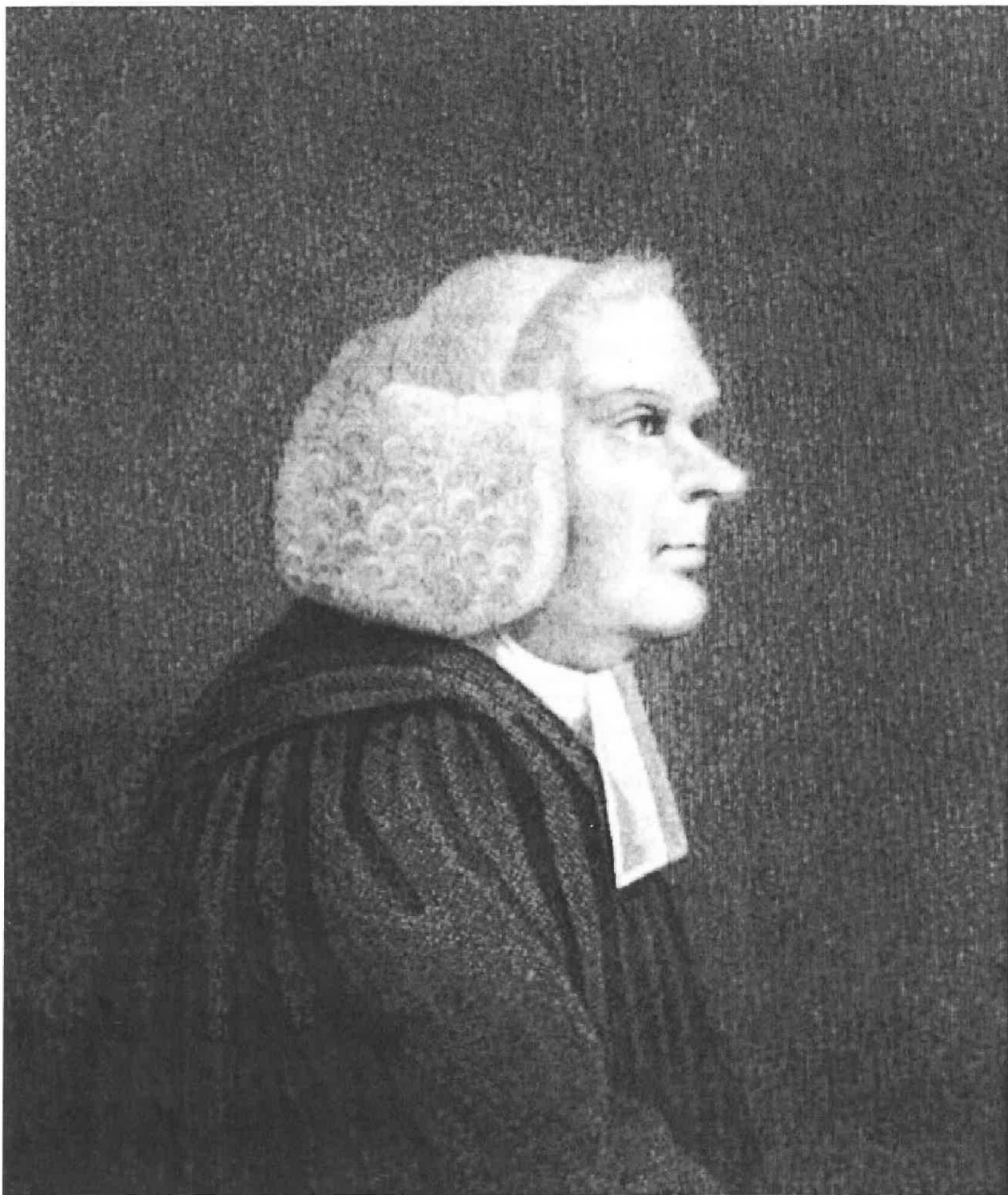


Figure 1: John Berridge of Everton, 1716-1793<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Semper Reformata, <http://semper-reformata.com/2011/10/29/266/> [accessed October 10, 2011].

## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation will analyze the life and ministry of the evangelical pastor, John Berridge of Everton (1716-1793) who stood as the central figure in the Cambridgeshire Revival (1759), the Calvinist Controversy (1773), and whose life intersected with most of the key figures in the English Evangelical Revival.

The purpose of this study is first, to re-introduce the figure of John Berridge to a contemporary readership. Second, it will argue that it is John Berridge's appropriation of the post-Reformational experiential tradition with its re-discovery of justification by faith that is foundational to his conversion, surrounds his experience in the Cambridgeshire Revival, and sustains his ministry in Everton. Finally, using Berridge's life and ministry as an example, this study will reflect on the key issues facing pastors in the current cultural milieu: the need to re-cover the doctrine of justification by faith in pastoral preaching and ministry, understanding the context and nature of revival, the challenge of pastoring in and through revival, the prerequisites of a sustained ministry, and finishing well.



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*Who was John Berridge?* Despite the recent scholarly interest in the history of the Evangelical movement, no biography of Berridge (1716-1793) remains in print today.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps there are good reasons for this. Unlike well-known figures such as John Wesley (1703-1791) or George Whitefield (1714-1770), Berridge never kept a journal or a diary. The church where he pastored for 37 years was not prestigious or situated in a large town or city, but rather located in a relatively insignificant rural town called Everton with a largely illiterate and uneducated congregation. Not liking to write, Berridge's letters never reached the epistolary heights of his good friends, John Newton (1725-1807) and Henry Venn (1724-1797) in the area of spiritual counsel and guidance. As for theological contribution, again Berridge offered little. Berridge's only work of any notoriety remains *The Christian World Unmasked: Pray Come and Peep* which was published in 1773.<sup>2</sup>

Berridge's personality did not help his cause. For those who did know John Berridge, a common adjective was employed to describe him: *eccentric*. Alongside William Grimshaw (1708-1763), John Berridge is widely viewed as one of the most

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<sup>1</sup> See David W. Bebbington and Mark A. Noll, eds., *A History of Evangelicalism, 5 Volumes* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003). Currently, three of the five volumes have been published. Though John Berridge occupies individual chapters in Evangelical surveys, the only full biography of Berridge is by Nigel R. Pibworth, *The Gospel Pedlar: The Story of John Berridge and the Eighteenth-Century Revival* (Welwyn, Hertfordshire: Evangelical Press, 1987). This biography is currently out of print.

<sup>2</sup> John Berridge, *The Christian World Unmasked* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1854).

colorful figures of eighteenth-century Evangelicalism.<sup>3</sup> Bishop Ryle, while regarding Berridge as an important leader of the eighteenth-century, cannot disguise his own perplexity regarding Berridge's oddities. He writes, "Of all the English evangelists of the eighteenth-century, this good man was undeniably the most quaint and eccentric." Again, "Without controversy, he was a very odd person...a minister who said and did things which nobody else could do." Even in praising Berridge, Ryle cannot resist adding a qualification by noting, "With all his peculiarities, he was a man of rare gifts..."<sup>4</sup>

Others were less polite in their appraisal of Berridge and his eccentricities. Many historians of the nineteenth-century found Berridge too strange, too unrefined and his manner too peculiar for their Victorian tastes. Robert Southey, in his *Life of Wesley*, called Berridge a "buffoon as well as fanatic" whereas W. E. H. Lecky wrote, "he was eccentric almost to insanity"<sup>5</sup>

Even in his time, Berridge's closest admirers admitted that the vicar of Everton had his peculiarities. Berridge's dear friend, John Newton noted as much. In a letter to the Reverend Mr. Symonds, Newton writes, "I am glad to hear that Mr. Berridge has been with you, and that the visit was so much to your satisfaction. I am persuaded that as he gets opportunity to know you, he will love you dearly, and though he has some

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<sup>3</sup> L. E. Elliot-Binns writes, "In many ways Berridge and Grimshaw were much alike, though the eccentricities of the latter were outdone by the vicar of Everton..." L.E. Elliot-Binns, *The Early Evangelicals: A Religious and Social Study* (Greenwich, UK: Seabury Press, 1953), 276.

<sup>4</sup> J. C. Ryle, *The Christian Leaders of the Last Century* (Moscow: Charles Nolan Press, 2002), 196.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Smyth, *Simeon and Church Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 166fn. Lecky does have some good things to say about Berridge's sincerity.

*little irregularities*, I know no person whose converse is more spiritual and edifying [italics mine].”<sup>6</sup>

What makes this eccentric vicar a subject worth studying? The answer is not found in his theological writings or organizational abilities, but is found in this simple fact: *John Berridge was an extraordinary pastor*. Illustrations of this will be explored throughout this study, but two examples will suffice by way of introduction. The first is found in a memorial of the establishment of Sandy Baptist Church in Bedfordshire. The memorial which dates on October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1887 reads:

The Baptist cause in this place originated, indirectly, through the preaching of the Rev. John Berridge, who was vicar of Everton, in Bedfordshire, from 1755 to 1793. The late Mr William Skilleter’s grandfather, Mr John Skilleter, was a man of strong memory, a lover of good singing, and a staunch adherent of his parish church. Mr Berridge’s popularity somewhat vexed him; but as there was excellent singing at Everton he determined to go to Everton to hear the singing and to bring home as much of the sermon as he could retain, that he might have some amusement over it with his companions, but the Lord ordered it otherwise. The first sermon he heard from Mr Berridge went to his heart, he became a changed man, and from that time a constant attendant upon Mr Berridge’s ministry. Mr John Skilleter had to endure some little cross from the opposition of his wife for so doing...[On one] occasion the good lady carried her opposition so far as to hide his hat and great coat and he went without them. By dint of much persuasion she was induced to accompany her husband one Sunday to Everton to hear Mr Berridge for herself; the first sermon was the means of her conversion to God. Mr and Mrs John Skilleter continued to worship at Everton till Mr Berridge’s death.<sup>7</sup>

The second illustration is offered by John Byng, later the fifth Viscount Torrington, who visited Bedfordshire in 1789 and makes this observation in his journal:

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<sup>6</sup> John Newton, Letter to Rev. Mr. Symonds, January, 1772, (Unpublished correspondence from Marilyn Rouse).

<sup>7</sup> Memorial of the founding of Sandy Baptist Church, Sandy, Bedfordshire, October 4, 1887.

*Sunday, May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1789*

...The Doctor now comes Mounted to attend me; and we rode first to see the Doctors Stud, a Brood Mare, a Colt, and a Hackney, and his two Cows; thence over the Sandy Hills to near Everden Church (whence were many people returning from the Evening-Service) where a famous Preacher has been renowned in his Pulpit for many years. His Face appears to me abundant of Honesty, Zeal, and good works: tho' no Disciple of Lavaters there seems as if much useful knowledge were to be acquired from the studying of Physiognomy...To his Church does the County flock for Instructions, and Consolation: But He is generally term'd a Methodist: and as such held out by the Clergy, as a stumbling Block, and a dangerous Character.

Now what the Title of Methodist is meant to signify I know not; but if these Preachers do restore attention, and congregations within the Churches, and do preach the Word of God, They appear to me as Men most commendable; and as useful to the Nation, by their Opposition to the Church Ministry, as in an opposition of The Minister of the Country, in Parliament; Active Orators keeping Vigilant Observation, and Preventing any Idleness in, or abuse of their authority: and so tending as effectually to the Preservation of our Rights, as these Methodistical Preachers do to the conservation of Religion. They are like military Martinets, who are scoff'd at by the Ignorant, and Indolent, but who preserve the Army from Ruin.<sup>8</sup>

These two first-hand descriptions of Berridge and his ministry reveal a great deal about the significant influence that he had in the lives of ordinary people and in the region as a whole. First, they accent *Berridge's powerful personality and the gifts he possessed*. There are numerous stories of detractors coming to hear Berridge with the purpose of mocking him, but who, in leaving the meetings had been brought to the point of conversion. As will be reiterated throughout this study, Berridge was an extraordinary preacher who understood the hearts of his auditors and thus preached in a manner that connected deeply with people.

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<sup>8</sup> C. Bruyn Andrews, ed., *The Torrington Diaries* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1954), 143-144.

Second, *Berridge was a controversial figure in his day*. Though a minister in the Church of England, Berridge was labelled a “Methodist”. This was a derogatory term that implied association with John Wesley and his followers, but also was applied to any minister who showed “zeal”, preached experimentally (that is, with life application), and who preached outside the regimen and boundaries dictated by the Established Church. Berridge was guilty on all counts.<sup>9</sup> Throughout his life, Berridge was viewed with outright hostility by the majority of clergy he encountered. At one point, Berridge’s bishop reproved him for preaching every day, at all hours, and in places outside his own parish. Berridge’s response was humble yet forthright, “My Lord, I preach only at two times.” “Which are they, Mr. Berridge?” “In season, and out of season, my Lord.”<sup>10</sup> As will be explored, Berridge’s zeal for the Gospel and for preaching whenever and wherever he could, far from making him “a dangerous character” drew thousand of people to Christ and served to preserve a society that was undergoing serious moral decay.

Third, these two anecdotes bear testimony to *the legacy that Berridge had in the surrounding region*. The legacy was never organizational, but pastoral. It was connected to Berridge’s influence as a preacher and shepherd. As Berridge’s biographer, Nigel Pibworth put it, “[Berridge’s] memorials were people rather than books.”<sup>11</sup> It was through his influence as a preacher that many in Bedfordshire experienced conversion

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<sup>9</sup> Though in time, Berridge distanced himself from Wesley and his movement. See Chapter 9.

<sup>10</sup> John Berridge, *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Berridge, A.M., with a Memoir of his life by the Rev. Richard Whittingham* (London: Paternoster Row, 1864), lv.

<sup>11</sup> Pibworth, *Gospel Pedlar*, 7.

but it was through his influence as a shepherd – ministering to the same parish for 37 years – that Berridge’s legacy as the “central figure in East Anglia” was established.<sup>12</sup>

So, how did Berridge become such a “central figure” with such an enduring legacy? Like many of his pastoral counterparts, including his good friend Henry Venn, Berridge’s conversion took place years after he was established as a minister for the Church of England. It is in the circumstances of his conversion that one discovers the secret to his effectiveness as an evangelist, a preacher, and a shepherd.

It was John Berridge’s appropriation of the post-Reformational experiential tradition with its re-discovery of *justification by faith* that was foundational to his conversion.<sup>13</sup> And it was this re-discovery that continually undergirded his experience as an evangelist and pastor. Finally, it was this re-discovery that surrounded his experience in the Cambridgeshire Revival and sustained his ministry in Everton for 37 years.

This purpose of this study is therefore fourfold. First, it intends to re-introduce the “forgotten apostle of Bedfordshire” as a pastor worthy of exploration.<sup>14</sup> In so doing, this study will second, analyze Berridge’s key role in the Cambridgeshire Revival with particular emphasis on the relationship between his re-discovery of the doctrine of justification by faith, his re-energized preaching, and the events surrounding the revival.

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<sup>12</sup> A. Skevington Wood, *The Inextinguishable Blaze: Spiritual Renewal and Advance in the 18<sup>th</sup> century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1960), 210.

<sup>13</sup> The three characteristics associated with this doctrine are as follows: 1. Justification is the forensic declaration that believers are righteous in their status through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ; 2. There is a distinction between justification – the external act by which believers are made righteous, and sanctification or regeneration, which is the interior process of renewal and growth in holiness; 3. Justifying righteousness is the “alien righteousness of Christ, external to humans and imputed to them, rather than a righteousness which is inherent to them, located within them, or which in any sense may be said to belong to them.” The righteousness on which humans are to be judged is external to them. See Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification Third Edition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 212-213.

<sup>14</sup> D. Marshall, “John Berridge, The Forgotten Apostle of Bedfordshire” cited in Pibworth, *Gospel Pedlar*, 6.

Third, this study will explore the important factors which contributed to Berridge's lengthy tenure as pastor in Everton. Finally, using Berridge's life and ministry as a backdrop, this study will reflect on the key issues facing pastors today with regards to:

- The role that the doctrine of grace plays within preaching and ministry today
- Understanding the context and nature of revival
- The challenge of pastoring in and through revival
- The prerequisites of a sustained ministry experience
- Finishing well in life and ministry

Along with his eccentricity, John Berridge was marked with a deep humility – a humility that became more pronounced the older he got. Berridge would have undoubtedly objected to seeing his life or ministry experience as important enough to comprise the subject of a biographical study. However, it is this very combination of humility and ministry effectiveness that, along with his other qualities, make the eccentric vicar of Everton worthy of a second look.

## CHAPTER 2

### BACKGROUND TO THE EVANGELICAL REVIVAL IN ENGLAND

The Cambridgeshire Revival in which John Berridge ministered did not take place in isolation but rather occurred against a much larger backdrop of what historians have termed “The Evangelical Revival” in Britain and “The Great Awakening” in North America.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, in order to appreciate what happened in 1759, it is necessary to step back and look at the wider context of the religious quickening that began to occur as early as the mid-1730’s. In doing so, the next two chapters will address five key questions which, when answered, help to place Berridge’s life and ministry within the proper context.<sup>2</sup> The key questions are:

- *What were the social and cultural circumstances of the Revival?*
- *What was the state of religion in England prior to the outbreak of the Revival?*
- *How did the Evangelical Revival break out?*
- *What were the defining characteristics of the Revival?*
- *How did these characteristics influence and shape Berridge’s ministry?*

#### ***The Social and Cultural Context of the Evangelical Revival***

English society at the turn of the eighteenth-century was undergoing a series of major changes. Unprecedented industrial growth transformed the English from an

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<sup>1</sup> There are many standard works on the Evangelical Revival and the Great Awakening. See Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003); W.R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002); David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1780s* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989); Thomas Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> This chapter will look at the first two questions and the next chapter will address the remaining three.



essentially agrarian-based society into what Paul Langford has termed “a polite and commercial people.”<sup>3</sup> One of the consequences of these changes was the emergence of a rising educated, middle class in England. As literacy improved, so grew a prejudice against tradition towards an emphasis on personal understanding. Investigation began to supersede blind deference to authority. The philosophy of *empiricism*, under the influences of such philosophers as John Locke (1632-1704) and later, David Hume (1711-1776) exalted reason and science and encouraged suspicion in matters pertaining to the supernatural. As a consequence, popular perception of both the Church and its clergy began to slowly change. Rather than assigning authority and knowledge in the church and its traditions, authority and the appropriation of knowledge began to be placed in the *self*.

The early eighteenth-century also witnessed tremendous technological developments. During this time, the areas of transportation and telecommunication were significantly improved and would play important roles as the Revival began to spread. However, the changing intellectual environment, technological change, rapid population growth, and the effects of industrialization and urbanization also placed increasing pressure upon the Established Church to respond effectively to the needs these changes produced in society.

One practical problem arising from the effects of rapid industrialization and urbanization was that it placed tremendous pressure on the infrastructure of existing

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<sup>3</sup> See Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

cities and their capacity to provide housing to a burgeoning population. In the end, it was the ever-increasing number of urban poor that suffered the greatest.

Drunkenness also became a pressing issue during this period. Historian G.R. Balleine writes of the eighteenth-century condition, "All business was transacted in taverns, and the typical merchant of the period constantly enters in his diary: 'got very drunk,' 'undoubtedly the worse for drinking,' 'cannot say I came home sober.'"<sup>4</sup> However, it was again among the poorer classes where the painful effects of drunkenness were felt the deepest. When government restrictions were removed from the sale of alcohol, people turned from beer to gin as the cheap narcotic of choice in the early eighteenth-century.<sup>5</sup> In 1688, with a population of slightly more than five million, the national consumption of beer was more than twelve and a half million barrels, (90 gallons for every man, woman, and child). But the effects of gin were considerably worse. In fact, by 1750, the consumption of poorly distilled and essentially poisonous gin was 11 million gallons. Historian, David Jeffrey notes that at this time in St. Giles, Holburn, of the 2000 houses in the town, 506 were gin shops. In Westminster, he points out that every eighth house had been turned into a gin outlet.<sup>6</sup>

Artist, satirist and social commentator, William Hogarth (1697-1764) captures the desperate social conditions of the urban poor in his famous woodcutting, *Gin Lane*

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<sup>4</sup> G.R. Balleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908), 13.

<sup>5</sup> To sell beer required a licence, but anyone could make and sell gin. See Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, 13.

<sup>6</sup> David Jeffrey, *English Spirituality in the Age of Wesley* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 9.

(Figure 2).<sup>7</sup> In this work, Hogarth depicts an urban scene in which the only buildings found intact are the tavern, the pawn broker, and the distillery. As the details of Hogarth's work illustrate, the harmful effects of gin were widespread and led to starvation, murder, insanity, despair and suicide.<sup>8</sup> In a disturbing touch, Hogarth locates the church in the distant background seemingly oblivious to the worsening social conditions of the city.



Figure 2: *Gin Lane*, William Hogarth, 1750

Among the higher orders, moral conditions were not much better. Hogarth depicts the state of affairs of the upper class as desperate as the lower orders. In a series of paintings entitled *Marriage a la Mode* (see Figure 3), Hogarth tells the story of

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<sup>7</sup> William Hogarth, "Gin Lane", woodcutting, London: 1750. From British Museum. [http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight\\_objects/pd/w/william\\_hogarth,\\_gin\\_lane.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/pd/w/william_hogarth,_gin_lane.aspx) [accessed December 28, 2011].

<sup>8</sup> It could be that Hogarth had St. Giles in mind. At the right of the picture, there are two schoolgirls drinking gin wearing the St. Giles school uniform.

Lord Squanderfield, his wife, their vacuous way of life, descent into debauchery, despair, and ultimately an ignoble death.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 3: William Hogarth, *Marriage a la Mode*, 1743-1745

Along with drunkenness, eighteenth-century English society was also a cruel society. In particular, animals were the objects of nauseating popular entertainment. A newspaper advertisement in 1730 read, "A mad bull to be dressed up with fireworks...a dog to be dressed up with fireworks over him, a bear to be let loose at the same time, and a cat to be tied to the bull's tail." Country fairs were held where foxes and cats were eaten alive; sheep intended for slaughter had their faces slashed and their tendons cut and old horses were worked to death. This penchant for cruelty extended beyond the lower classes and encompassed every order of society. Even parsons were well known to have kept cocks for the purpose of fighting.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> William Hogarth, "Marriage a la Mode", woodcutting, London: 1743-1745. From British Museum. [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search\\_the\\_collection\\_database/search\\_object\\_image.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_image.aspx) [accessed December 28, 2011].

<sup>10</sup> See Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, 14-15. See also Robin Furneaux, *William Wilberforce* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1974), 199-202.

Another form of popular “entertainment” was the public execution. The Criminal Law was merciless and listed no less than 253 capital offenses one could commit. For example, anyone caught stealing as little as forty shillings faced a sentence of death by hanging. Therefore, every Monday much of London turned out at Tyburn to witness a public hanging. The rich would pay for good seats while food sellers sold oranges for people to eat while they watched. Because no drop was permitted, the average duration of a hanging could be prolonged for as much as thirty minutes.

### ***The State of Religion Prior to the Outbreak of the Revival***



Figure 4: William Hogarth, *The Sleeping Congregation*, 1736<sup>11</sup>

In the midst of these worsening conditions, the Church was slow to respond. Whereas there are notable exceptions, there is a general consensus among modern church historians that in the first half of the eighteenth-century, the response of the

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<sup>11</sup> William Hogarth, “The Sleeping Congregation”, woodcutting, Princeton: 1736. From Princeton University Library, [http://libweb5.princeton.edu/Visual\\_Materials/gallery/hogarth/hogarth2.html](http://libweb5.princeton.edu/Visual_Materials/gallery/hogarth/hogarth2.html) [accessed December 28, 2011]

Established Church was torpor and largely ineffective in alleviating the desperate conditions in these rapidly expanding urban areas.<sup>12</sup>

In light of the social and moral conditions of English society, how was the church popularly perceived? Again, William Hogarth offers a visual of the church at the time. His depiction in *The Sleeping Congregation* (see Figure 4) shows the church as non-vibrant, asleep to the growing needs of society, ineffective and ultimately irrelevant.

It is important to note that social commentators such as Hogarth and nineteenth-century historians like G.R. Balleine may have over-exaggerated the impotence of the Church at the time. The fact is there *were* faithful pastors carrying out their pastoral duties with diligence throughout the nation in the early part of the eighteenth-century. Indeed, in the face of what was widely perceived as a nation descending into immorality and indifference, some church leaders sounded alarm bells. In 1734, Joseph Trapp wrote, “[A]ll manner of wickedness, both in principle and practice, abounds among us to a degree unheard of since Christianity was in being...I have lived in six reigns: but for about twenty years past, the English nation has been...so prodigiously debauched that I am almost a foreigner in my own country.”<sup>13</sup>

However, it remains a telling statistic that of the 224 churches built from 1700-1800, the majority of these were not constructed in areas where they were most

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<sup>12</sup> The group with the largest influence in these growing urban areas would be the Methodists. In another of Hogarth's works, *The Idle Prentice: Executed at Tyburn*, it is interesting to note that Hogarth inserts a Methodist preacher accompanying the prisoner to the public hanging.

<sup>13</sup> John Walsh, “Introduction: The Church and Anglicanism in the ‘long’ eighteenth century”, in *The Church of England c. 1689 – c. 1833*, eds. John Walsh and Stephen Taylor, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 21

needed, namely, areas of urban growth.<sup>14</sup> Mark Noll makes this evaluation on the state of religion prior to the outbreak of the Revival, "[E]ven objective evaluators have recognized that confident religious life, persuasive preaching of the gospel and effective Christian pastoring were in relatively short supply during the first decades of the eighteenth century."<sup>15</sup>

Why was the Church so ineffective at this time? One possible answer lies in the erosion of orthodox theology at the turn of the century caused by the philosophy of *empiricism*. Influenced by John Locke's *Letters Concerning Toleration* (1689-1692), *Essay on Human Understanding* (1690) and *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695), there was a marked shift away from traditional understandings of theology and the church towards an increased emphasis on the power and authority of *human reason*. This shift is expressed in the influential sermons of the seventeenth-century divine, Archbishop John Tillotson (1630-1694). Tillotson argued that all problems related to the matters of religion could be investigated and ultimately resolved through the means of common sense and reason. The call of the Christian, according to Tillotson, was to cultivate a sense of duty and morality rather than focus on such outdated notions as original sin, substitutionary atonement, revelation, and the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>16</sup> Following in Tillotson's footsteps were theologians such as Samuel Clarke (1675-1729), John Toland (1670-1722), Anthony Collins (1676-1729), Thomas Woolston (1670-1733) and Matthew Tindal (1657-1733).

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<sup>14</sup> Walsh, *The Church of England*, 10.

<sup>15</sup> Noll, *Rise of Evangelicalism*, 39.

<sup>16</sup> See Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 40-41.

Ultimately, the effect of this growing body of literature was that it began to move the Established Church inexorably away from orthodoxy towards Unitarianism and Deism. God was replaced with human reason; the supernatural was replaced with morality; revelation was replaced with the senses and the authority of the Church was replaced with the authority of the self.<sup>17</sup>

A further consequence of Deism was that it distracted capable clergy from the ministry of the Church. Men such as Bishop Joseph Butler (1692-1752) and Bishop William Warburton (1698-1779), rather than focusing their energies on the pastoral needs arising out of the changing social and cultural milieu, devoted much their effort in writing apologetic literature which was “much more anxious to show that Christianity was true than to apply it.”<sup>18</sup>

Pluralism and non-residence, that is, the practice of rectors occupying the livings of multiple parishes and, as a consequence, failing to fulfill their pastoral duties in specific parishes, was another serious issue plaguing the Established Church. An extreme example of this is found in the Bishop of Llandaff who at one point was the rector of two parishes in Shropshire, two parishes in Leicestershire, two parishes in Isle of Ely, three parishes in Huntingdonshire, seven parishes in Wales – all the while living as a prosperous farmer in Westmoreland.<sup>19</sup> As an unhappy consequence of pluralism, many

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<sup>17</sup> One sees the continued effects of Deism in 1760 when, in the face of evangelical preaching, the Archbishop Drummond of York commented, “If you go on preaching such stuff you will drive all your parish mad! Were you to inculcate the morality of Socrates, it would do more good than canting about the new birth.” A.C.H. Seymour, *The Life and Times of Selina Countess of Huntingdon. Volume 1*, (London: William Edward Painter, 1839), 280.

<sup>18</sup> L.E. Elliot-Binns, *The Early Evangelicals: A Religious and Social Study*, (Greenwich, UK: The Seabury Press, 1953), 95.

<sup>19</sup> Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, 18.



parishes failed to even provide a curate. Where there were curates, the majority of them lived in poverty, earning £50 or less per annum, but shouldering the bulk of the work of ministry to not simply one town, but to as many as seven villages.<sup>20</sup> The result was that most churches held only one service per week, many only held one every two weeks, but when the winter came, a good number of rural churches held no services at all.

Church buildings were in an awful state of disrepair with often no glass, flooring, seats or even reading desk.<sup>21</sup> In Bedfordshire where Berridge spent most of his ministry years, poor maintenance and the lack of church upkeep often led to church towers crumbling. In 1740, after the Pulloxhill steeple had crashed and no money could be raised for its replacement, it was stated that the remaining building was “so ruinous and decayed that the parishioners cannot assemble for divine service without danger of their lives, the church must be entirely rebuilt.”<sup>22</sup>

Sermons, when offered, may have been theologically orthodox but were in delivery often lifeless and dull. Because of a growing distrust of the mysterious aspects of Christianity, what was typically offered in a sermon did little either to teach or affect the heart. Elliot-Binns writes, “Orthodox in views, and blameless in life, they [curates]

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<sup>20</sup> Walsh, *Church of England*, 8 The salary that the average curate would earn would be at the same level as a small farmer. See H. Abbey, Charles and John H. Overton, *The English Church in the Eighteenth-Century* (Middlesex, UK: The Echo Library, 1896), 250.

<sup>21</sup> A source of the problem lay again in the practice of Pluralism. Often the parsonage house of the vicarage fell into disrepair through its non-use which made it unliveable for any potential resident incumbent. See Joyce Godber, *History of Bedfordshire* (Bedfordshire, UK: Bedfordshire County Council, 1984), 338.

<sup>22</sup> Godber, *Bedfordshire*, 341.

were content with a minimum of service, and, having no deep religious convictions, their ministry was inevitably lacking in inspiration and zeal.”<sup>23</sup>

Though G.R. Balleine could be faulted in depicting the conditions prior to the Revival as overly dark and bleak, he nevertheless is not far from the mark when he describes the overall circumstances out of which the Evangelical Revival would emerge. He writes, “If we would understand the work of the Great Revival, this dark side of the picture must be constantly kept in mind – a people coarse, brutal, ignorant, and a Church that had forgotten its mission, unspiritual, discredited, useless.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Elliot-Binns, *Early Evangelicals*, 103.

<sup>24</sup> Balleine, *Evangelical Party*, 21.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE EVANGELICAL REVIVAL IN ENGLAND

Having established that there was a deep need for revival in the land, the question still remains, *how did the Evangelical Revival break out?* Church historians such as W.R. Ward and Mark Noll have noted that there were three key antecedents to the Revival: the Puritan tradition in England, the rise of Continental Piety and High Church spirituality.<sup>1</sup>

#### ***Puritan Tradition in England***

It has been argued that under the Act of Uniformity in 1662, the Puritan presence within the Church of England had been weakened greatly.<sup>2</sup> When Bishop Morely of Winchester was asked what position the Arminians held, he quipped that they held all the best bishoprics in England.<sup>3</sup> However, by the early eighteenth-century, the Puritan heritage had not altogether disappeared, but rather survived throughout the country in a number of important ways. First, Puritan doctrinal and devotional material remained popular and widely read. For example, the writings of John Bunyan and John Owen maintained the ideal of a genuine “religion of the heart” centered on the person and work of Christ. Richard Baxter’s *The Reformed Pastor* also remained influential as a

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<sup>1</sup> See Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 50-76; W.R. Ward, *The Protestant evangelical awakening* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 296-352.

<sup>2</sup> J.D. Walsh writes, “Calvinism had acquired deep psychological associations with the Civil War and Commonwealth, the antinomianism of the sectaries, the dismemberment of the Church, the killing of the king. These folk memories dogged it like a kind of political original sin for more than a century to come.” Cited in Bruce Hindmarsh, “The Roots of Evangelical Spirituality” (lecture notes, Regent College, Vancouver, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Hindmarsh, “The Roots of Evangelical Spirituality”

model of parish evangelism – a model that key evangelicals including John Berridge embraced in their ministry. Second, the Church of England’s thirty-nine articles were rooted in Puritan Calvinism which influenced many of the early evangelicals (including Berridge) to embrace Calvinist theology. Third, the Puritan model of using the pulpit as the chief means to press for renewal was maintained by the early evangelicals in the Revival. The pulpit, both in the church and in the field, remained the focal point around which calls for spiritual renewal went out. Perhaps most importantly, the Puritan paradigm for understanding conversion – *The Golden Chain* - influenced by Puritan writers such as William Perkins (1558-1602) shaped how many of the early evangelicals interpreted their own *ordo salutis*, that is, their understanding of conversion and salvation.<sup>4</sup> In many ways, the Puritan heritage survived like pools in different parts of the country.<sup>5</sup> One of these “pools” was located in John Berridge’s Bedfordshire. In fact, it was Bedfordshire where Puritan John Bunyan preached after his release from prison in 1677 and continued to preach and teach until his death in 1688.<sup>6</sup>

### ***The Rise of Continental Piety***

Continental Pietism also was a contributing factor to the Evangelical Revival. Influenced by Puritanism, German pietism in the late seventeenth-century through the writings of Philip Jacob Spener (1635-1705) proved catalytic to the awakenings experienced in Britain and North America. In his work, *Pia Desideria*, Spener wrote of six remedies to the current state of religion. First, he called Christians to return to the

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<sup>4</sup> See Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 33-61.

<sup>5</sup> Hindmarsh, “Roots of Evangelical Spirituality” (lecture notes).

<sup>6</sup> Godber, *Bedfordshire*, 238.

Scriptures; second, he encouraged a greater lay participation in the realm of religion particularly through the formation of small groups; third, he encouraged a shift from correct doctrine to practical godliness; fourth, Spener challenged Christians to turn away from vain controversies and instead develop a religion of the heart; fifth, Spener warned those with a lukewarm faith to become truly converted; finally, he challenged ministers to not just preach the faith, but to live it out. Each of Spener's emphases helped shape the spirituality and expression of the early revival movement in England.<sup>7</sup>

Spener's writings deeply affected two other notable figures, namely August Hermann Franke (1663-1727) and his student Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760). In 1727, the Herrnhut community experienced revival under Zinzendorf's leadership.<sup>8</sup> One of the effects of the revival was the formation of the Unity of Brethren or Moravians. This is significant for two reasons: one, the Moravians insisted on the possibility that one could have direct, experiential access to Christ through faith. Second, the Moravians organized themselves into small groups for spiritual accountability and growth. It was these small groups which were encouraged to carry out missions throughout the world. And so, as early as 1728, Moravian missionaries were sent to England and through their missionary work, impacted the emergence and shaped the expression of the Evangelical Revival. This Moravian impact would also be felt in Berridge's Bedfordshire, for in 1745, the Bedford Moravian church was

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<sup>7</sup> Philip Jacob Spener, *Pia Desideria*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, Press, 1964), 76-123.

<sup>8</sup> See Ward, *Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, 116-159.

established and its message of personal, experiential faith spread to the surrounding towns.<sup>9</sup>

### ***High Church Spirituality***

The third antecedent of the Evangelical Revival was High Church Spirituality, in particular, the spiritual writings of William Law. Law's *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1729) was widely read and affected deeply many of the leaders of early evangelicalism.<sup>10</sup> In considering the rise of Methodism in England, Bishop Warburton once wrote, "William Law was its father, and Count Zinzendorf rocked the cradle."<sup>11</sup> Law's main contribution to the revival was that he reintroduced the importance of "inward religion" and the necessity of living a holy life.

However, Law's call to a devout and holy life also had unexpected results. It led to an ever increasing frustration among his early admirers such as John and Charles Wesley and Henry Venn. This was in part due to a deepening sense of futility when it came to self-efforts towards holiness. In the end, much of the evangelical impulse of the early revivalists, though initially influenced by Law's call to piety, ironically came out of a reaction against Law's spirituality and a shift towards the doctrine of free grace offered in and through Jesus Christ. But to move to this position, many of the revival leaders had

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<sup>9</sup> Godber, *Bedfordshire*, 353.

<sup>10</sup> Those influenced by Law's writings included such notable evangelical figures as John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, Henry Venn, Thomas Scott, Thomas Adam of Winteringham, James Stillingfleet and John Newton.

<sup>11</sup> L.E. Elliot-Binns, *The Early Evangelicals: A Religious and Social Study* (Greenwich, UK: The Seabury Press, 1953), 121.

first to journey through the writings of William Law. As Venn wryly put it, “Law came before the Gospel.”<sup>12</sup>

### ***Revival Breaks Out***

The first stirrings of revival in Britain began in 1734. As argued above, these stirrings did not emerge *ex nihilo* but were rooted in the Puritan heritage in England, the influence of Continental Pietism, and the emphasis on holy living found in High Church spirituality. Further, there had been examples of religious quickening in Europe before 1734. As early as 1708, there were camp-like prayer meetings in Silesia led by children in which many parents were later converted. These meetings contributed to a chain of revivals taking place throughout Protestant Europe in the 1720’s including in Zinzendorf’s Herrnhut.<sup>13</sup>

In late 1734, there occurred a number of seemingly disconnected episodes which marked the start of the Evangelical Revival. Across the Atlantic in New England, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) preached a two-part sermon on the topic, “Justification by Faith” to his Northampton congregation. His sermon argued that “We are justified only by faith in Christ, and not by any manner of virtue or goodness of our own.”<sup>14</sup> The effects of this sermon were palpable and immediate. By the beginning of the following year, Northampton found itself in the midst of an extraordinary outbreak of religious

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<sup>12</sup> Elliot-Binns, *Early Evangelicals*, 122.

<sup>13</sup> Ward, *Protestant evangelical awakening*, 43-44. Many of these revivals were also precipitated by children.

<sup>14</sup> Cited in Noll, *Rise of Evangelicalism*, 77. See also George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 150-170.

fervor which Edwards described in his highly influential work, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*.<sup>15</sup>

The spring of 1735 witnessed a young George Whitefield (1714-1770) beginning to apprehend the meaning of free grace in his own life. By the summer of the following year, Whitefield preached his first sermon. The effects of his preaching were electric.<sup>16</sup>

In Wales during the late spring of 1735, a young schoolmaster named Howell Harris (1714-1773) was convinced during a communion service that his sins were completely and truly forgiven in Christ. This prompted Harris to begin open-air preaching.<sup>17</sup> In the summer of the same year, Harris' countryman, Daniel Rowland (1711-1790) was also converted and took to itinerant preaching. By the end of 1737, Rowland was preaching to crowds numbering between fifteen hundred and two thousand. Through the influence of both men, William Williams (1717-1791) was converted in 1737, left his curacy and became Rowland's assistant in ministry.

Back in England, 1735 was the year that John and Charles Wesley set sail for Georgia. As they journeyed, they were deeply impressed by the piety of some Moravian missionaries who happened to be on board their ship. Three years later, Moravian Peter Bohler met with John and Charles and informed them that they could achieve "dominion over sin and constant peace from a sense of forgiveness." In response, Charles recorded in his journal, "I was quite amazed and looked upon it as a new

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<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979).

<sup>16</sup> See Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 30-49.

<sup>17</sup> Don Lewis, ed. *Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730-1860 Volumes 1 & 2* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 2004), 522.



gospel.”<sup>18</sup> For ten days, Charles wrestled over this “new gospel” before writing in his journal on May 21, 1738, “I found myself convinced, I know not how, nor when...I now found myself at peace with God, and rejoiced in hope of loving Christ.”<sup>19</sup> Three days later, John Wesley made this famous entry in his journal:

In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.<sup>20</sup>

By 1739, news of revival had begun to spread with sensational reports coming in from a growing number of seemingly disconnected locations. The widespread phenomenon of the revival is captured in a hymn entitled “*Of Intercession and Thanksgiving for the Progress of the Gospel in various Parts of the World*” composed by Joseph Humphrey’s in 1743. In it, Humphrey describes in length how the revival was quickly spreading throughout the known world.

Thanks, with many thousand Tears,  
That Thy Church’s Labourers  
Ev’ry where such Blessings meet;  
For this Grace we kiss Thy Feet.  
Many in these latter Days  
Have experienc’d JESU’s Grace:

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<sup>18</sup> See S.T. Kimbrough and Kenneth Newport, *The Manuscript Journal of the Reverend Charles Wesley, M.A. Volume 1*, (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2008), 97-102. When Bohler asked Charles, “For what reason do you hope to be saved?” Charles responded, “Because I have used my best endeavours to serve God.” When Bohler shook his head, Charles thought him unkind and thought, “What! Are not my endeavours a sufficient ground of hope? Would you rob me of my endeavours? I have nothing else to trust to.”

<sup>19</sup> Kimbrough and Newport, *Journal of the Charles Wesley, Volume 1*, 107-108.

<sup>20</sup> Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, (London: Epworth Press, 2002), 144.

Souls in Europe, not a few,  
Find the Gospel-tidings true.

Britains Isle has catch'd the Flame;  
Many know and love the LAMB:  
Both in England and in Wales,  
And in Scotland, Grace prevails:  
London, Wilts, and Glou'stershire,  
Feel our SAVIOUR very dear:  
Bristol Sinners seek the LORD,  
And in Kingswood he's ador'd.

Throughout its twelve stanzas, Humphrey describes the global nature of the revival noting that it had extended to places throughout England, Wales and Scotland, but also had reached Germany, America, and even as far "Greenland's frozen Soil" which "Now's become His Cross's Spoil."<sup>21</sup>

To the early evangelicals, the revivals which were breaking out certainly seemed "surprising" and "new" and, in some respects, they were correct. The spontaneous, seemingly disconnected and widespread characteristics of the revival do suggest that what occurred in the 1730s was a "surprising work of God." However, as noted above, the Evangelical Revival did not take place in a historical vacuum, but was deeply shaped by the experiential tradition rooted in Puritanism, Continental Piety, and High Church spirituality. Further, its expression also reflected many of the conditions of contemporary eighteenth-century culture, particularly that of the Enlightenment. Put differently, the Evangelical movement that emerged from the Revival was truly a movement "of the heart" but nevertheless, a movement carried out in Enlightenment circumstances.

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<sup>21</sup> Hindmarsh, *Conversion*, 65-66. Moravian missionaries, in addition to reaching places as far away as South Africa in 1736 had also reached Greenland as early as 1733.

Many of the key characteristics expressed in these revivals worked in tandem with the cultural and intellectual climate in which they were occurring. Situated within the Enlightenment, the dynamic of the Evangelical Revival was both a response to and a reflection of the age. Augustan and Romantic ideals emphasized the importance of the senses and sentiment, sincerity, reason, simplicity of expression, a desire for the universal and ecumenical, and finally an emphasis on essentials. These characteristics certainly expressed themselves in different aspects of the Evangelical Revival.

One example of this is found in the rise of the *familiar letter* as an important means of communication during the eighteenth-century. With better roads, better transportation and an increasing movement of the population, there emerged an improved postal system. During the middle of the century, a person could write to someone in another major city and by the following Monday, receive a reply.<sup>22</sup> The style of the familiar letter with its emphasis on subjectivity over objectivity and harmony over exactness also reflected the spirit of the times. Because the recipient of the letter was expected to pay the postage, epistolary correspondence tended to be personal, simple, practical, short and clear.

Not surprisingly, the early evangelicals were avid and energetic letter-writers. The content of their correspondence also reflected this Augustan emphasis on clarity

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<sup>22</sup> Hindmarsh, *Conversion*, 74.

and concision and took advantage of the improved postal system to communicate both revival news and offer spiritual counsel.<sup>23</sup>

Further, early eighteenth-century England saw an increasing value placed on the Enlightenment ideals of *reason and experimental knowledge*, that is, knowledge attained via the senses. Again, this is reflected in early Evangelicalism and the manner by which early evangelicals defended the “enthusiasm” associated with the revivals which were occurring throughout the land. An example of this is found in the writing of one of Berridge’s friends, Henry Venn. In Venn’s *The Complete Duty of Man* he outlines a “system of doctrinal and practical Christianity” and includes a chapter on the “reasonableness” of experiencing joy through the avenue of prayer.<sup>24</sup>

John Wesley’s attitude and approach to ecstatic phenomena associated with revival was in many ways akin to that of an Enlightenment empiricist. Throughout his life, Wesley was always searching, gathering data, and reflecting on his experience during revivals. Not surprisingly, one of the chief reasons why Wesley journeyed to Berridge’s Everton was to discover *empirically* whether the eyewitness reports of revival were in fact true.

Changes in economic relations were also precipitated by the Enlightenment. Within a growing market economy, attention was placed more and more on the needs and wants of the individual consumer. As a result, it became increasingly natural to view religion and religious experience in similarly individualistic terms. How one related to

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<sup>23</sup> See further with respect to the rise of the familiar letter, Howard Anderson and Irvin Ehrenpreis, “The Familiar Letter in the Eighteenth Century,” in Howard Anderson et. al. (eds.), *Familiar Letter in the Eighteenth Century*, (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1966), 269-282.

<sup>24</sup> Henry Venn, *The Complete Duty of Man*, (New York: American Tract Society, 1838), 409-419.

God was perceived to be more and more a matter and consequence of individual choice.<sup>25</sup> Again, this emphasis on *direct, personal experience with God* marked a distinct shift away from the authority of Established Church and clergy towards the *individual* as the starting point and chief authority in understanding one's experience of God.

With the Enlightenment grew a sense of *optimism* over what humanity was capable of achieving on its own. Although many evangelicals decried efforts for self-improvement as ultimately futile, the spirit of the age nevertheless affected their language in describing the Christian life. This is reflected in a number of writings emerging from this period which, employing the language of the age, sought to analyze the rise and *progress* of religion in the individual's soul.<sup>26</sup> This sense of optimism also affected views of eschatology with many of the early evangelicals choosing to embrace a form of post-millennialism.

*Pragmatism* with its concomitant emphases on flexibility, toleration and practicality was another distinct characteristic of Enlightenment thinking expressed in eighteenth-century Evangelicalism. It was pragmatism that lay behind much of the evangelical activity during the Evangelical Revival. Field preaching and the practice of preaching outside one's own parish –both of which were important to the revival – developed out of pragmatic reasons. To both Methodists and evangelicals (at least early in the Revival), the lack of gospel preaching in most Established Churches was sufficient reason to take up the practice of “irregular” preaching, that is, the practice of preaching

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<sup>25</sup> See Hindmarsh, *Conversion*, 76.

<sup>26</sup> An example of this is Dissenter Philip Doddridge's work, *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Education, 1824).

outside one's given parish. Furthermore, it was out of this perceived practical need that lay people (including women among the Methodists) were also encouraged to preach and minister wherever they saw a spiritual need.

Pragmatism also affected the *content* of preaching during the revivals with pastors not simply being content to explicate doctrinal truth, but taking up the task to explain how the doctrines applied practically in the lives of their listeners. Berridge's sermon outlines reflect this practical emphasis. At the end of most of his outlines, he mapped out how the preached text would be practically applied in the lives of his auditors.<sup>27</sup>

The Evangelical Revival, though spontaneous and widespread in its scope, nevertheless, was a distinctly eighteenth-century phenomenon. By emphasizing personal access to God, the individual's need to develop a "lively experience of faith", the reasonableness of the revivals themselves, a focus on essentials, and the use of the familiar letter to communicate news of the spreading revival, the Evangelical movement at the beginning of the century reflected the values of the age in which it emerged. Though motivated as a response to the Enlightenment, the optimism of early Evangelicalism and its use of pragmatic means in carrying out the work of ministry also reflected the spirit of the times.

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<sup>27</sup> In his sermon on Proverbs 22:9, Berridge writes the following note under the title, "Application": "Do you feel you poverty? Are you crying for food? Is the food given? Are his merits made over to you: viz., his blood and righteousness? Have you the Spirit of Christ in you; and are you led by his Spirit?" John Berridge, *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Berridge, A.M., with a Memoir of his life by the Rev. Richard Whittingham* (London: Paternoster Row, 1864), 541.

### ***The Defining Characteristics of the Revival***

Bruce Hindmarsh has argued that the rise of Evangelicalism in the early eighteenth-century can be best understood as “a reinvigoration of the post-Reformation experiential tradition under the conditions of contemporary life in the eighteenth-century.”<sup>28</sup> It has been discussed above how the Evangelical Revival and the emerging Evangelicalism maintained a dialectical relation with the cultural context in which it occurred. But in what ways did it reflect this “post-Reformation experiential tradition”? One possible explanation is found in its appropriation of the Puritan understanding of conversion and its recovery of the doctrine of grace.

The Puritan “Golden Chain” of conversion provided the spiritual framework in which a person could discern the work of divine grace in his or her life. If believers could recognize certain “stages” in their own life, this would give them both an understanding of the state of their soul and the direction in which it was heading.

The Puritan pattern of conversion in the seventeenth-century essentially encompassed seven distinct stages a Christian would experience:

1. Serious religious impressions in childhood.
2. Descent into a state of “worldliness” and a concomitant hardening of the heart.
3. An awakening or “pricking” of the conscience.
4. A period of self-exertion and self-effort to justify oneself before God. This, in turn, simply exacerbated a sense of futility.

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<sup>28</sup> Hindmarsh, *Roots of Evangelical Spirituality*, (lecture notes).

5. A sense of despair.
6. Being led to a divine work in the soul, repentance, and the reception of the free gift of justification in Christ. Accompanying this is a deep sense of relief over the forgiveness of sins.
7. Being led into a life of service to God rooted in an abiding sense of gratitude for mercy and grace freely received.<sup>29</sup>

Inherent in the Puritan understanding of *ordo salutis* is the recovery of the Reformation's doctrine of Justification by Faith alone. Underlying this doctrine was the belief that Jesus Christ – through his life, death, resurrection and ascension - had accomplished everything required in order for one to receive salvation. The call to repentance – to turn to Jesus Christ in faith as the sole means and hope for salvation was the message that was embraced and proclaimed by the early evangelicals. To them, their foundation for salvation lay not in good works, not even in a combination of works and faith, but solely and completely in the work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. It was this message that resounded throughout the century and lay at the heart of Protestant Christianity's reinvigoration in Britain and North America.<sup>30</sup>

### ***John Berridge in Context***

The social and religious condition in which John Berridge was born, educated, converted and ministered was that of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment England. Therefore, it should not be surprising that Berridge's primary mode of communication

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<sup>29</sup> Hindmarsh, *Conversion*, 51-52. Not surprisingly, *The Golden Chain* of salvation deeply influenced and shaped Continental Piety, particularly in the life of August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) who, in turn, influenced the Moravian understanding of conversion.

<sup>30</sup> David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1780s* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 21.



with other leaders was through the use of the familiar letter. Though he never embraced letter-writing as much as John Wesley and John Newton, Berridge nevertheless did carry out much of his spiritual counsel through this means of communication. Accentuated by his rural context, Berridge's letters were concerned less with theological precision than with matters of "experimental" importance. The counsel that Berridge freely offered in his letters was often sprinkled with homely, practical illustrations for recipients to apply appropriately to their contexts.

Although a minister of the Established Church, Berridge's approach to ministry was also deeply pragmatic. To Berridge, practical necessity always outweighed propriety. By embracing field preaching and preaching outside his parish, he often paid little regard to the authority of the Anglican Church to which he belonged. In an undated letter, Berridge encouraged a young preacher to take up itinerant preaching out of this practical necessity:

If every parish church were blessed with a gospel minister, there could be little need of itinerant preaching; but since these ministers are thinly scattered about the country, and neighbouring pulpits are usually locked up against them, it behoves them to take advantage of fields or barns to cast abroad the gospel seed.<sup>31</sup>

Throughout his life, Berridge also identified, encouraged and supported a large number of lay pastors to carry out the work of itinerant preaching. This was also expressed in his encouragement and personal financing of lay itinerant preachers throughout the region. To Berridge, "[E]very believer was anointed by the Holy Spirit,

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<sup>31</sup> "Letter to the Rev. Mr.--" in Berridge, *Works*, 439.

and thereby led to the knowledge of all needful truths and, of course, that every true believer was qualified to preach the gospel, provided he had the gift of utterance.”<sup>32</sup>

Finally, the Puritan *Golden Chain* and the doctrine of justification by faith had tremendous influence on Berridge self-understanding of his own conversion and his ministry at Everton. In fact, it will be argued that it was Berridge’s recovery of the doctrine of justification by faith which formed the background to the Cambridgeshire Revival. Berridge’s growing recognition of God’s Sovereignty – especially during times of illness and incapacity - moved him throughout the 1760s away from Arminianism towards Calvinism. Finally, it was Berridge’s understanding and embracing of God’s saving grace that would sustain him throughout his days as a minister to his parish in Everton.

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<sup>32</sup>Nigel Pibworth, *The Gospel Pedlar: The Story of John Berridge and the Eighteenth-Century Revival*, (Hertfordshire, UK: Evangelical Press, 1987), 84.

## CHAPTER 4

### EARLY DAYS, CAMBRIDGE, AND CONVERSION

John Berridge was born on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1716 at Kingston, Nottinghamshire. His father, also John Berridge, was a respectable farmer of some means and was married to Miss Sarah Hathwait, of Nottingham in 1714. The couple had four sons of which John was the eldest. It seems that early on John Berridge Sr. had hoped that his son would follow him into the family business but soon learned that his son lacked both the interest and the business acumen necessary for this field. Rather than expressing interest in business, the teenage Berridge displayed an early interest in spiritual matters, the Bible, and a living a pious life. Resigning himself to that fact that his son's career path would be different from his own hopes and aspirations, Berridge Sr. informed his son, "John, I find you are unable to form any practical idea of the price of cattle, and therefore I shall send you to college, 'to be a light to the Gentiles.'"<sup>1</sup>

On October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1734, Berridge entered Clare Hall at Cambridge and completed his B.A. degree in 1738 and an M.A. in 1742. Described as large and snub-nosed, Berridge developed a reputation as a hard worker and a diligent student with a "natural vein of humour" and a "witty turn of mind."<sup>2</sup> It was this streak of humour that Berridge always maintained not only during his university years but also throughout his life as a pastor.

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<sup>1</sup> John Berridge, *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Berridge, A.M., with a Memoir of his life by the Rev. Richard Whittingham* (London: Paternoster Row, 1864), ix.

<sup>2</sup> Berridge, *Works*, x.

University life, while deepening Berridge's learning and love for knowledge nevertheless had negative effects on his spiritual life. Caught up with the prevailing philosophy of the college, it was not long before Berridge turned from the faith of his teen years and embraced Socinianism.<sup>3</sup> In his memoir of his vicar, Richard Whittingham, Berridge's curate, described how the philosophy affected his friend, "*As evil communications corrupt good manners*, he caught the contagion, and drank into the Socinian scheme to such a degree, as to lose all serious impressions, and discontinue private prayer for the space of ten years, a few intervals excepted."<sup>4</sup> From 1742 to 1749, Berridge frittered away his time at Clare Hall reading and not doing much else. Such was often the effect of university life in the eighteenth-century.<sup>5</sup>

At thirty-three years of age, Berridge accepted a curacy in Stapleford in 1749. Initially, at least, Berridge took seriously his new role and for six years served diligently as pastor. In retrospect, Berridge realized that much of his preaching during these years consisted of little more than calling his Stapleford congregation to moral improvement. As vigorously as Berridge preached, little fruit was shown for his efforts. Writing in 1758, Berridge recollected that he had "pressed sanctification upon them very earnestly yet they continued as unsanctified as before, and not one soul was brought to Christ. There was indeed a little more of the form of religion in the parish; but nothing more of the

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<sup>3</sup> Socinianism, with its roots in sixteenth-century non-Trinitarianism, was a term used to describe a view that rejected orthodox views of the Trinity, the depravity of man, and the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ.

<sup>4</sup> Berridge, *Works*, xi.

<sup>5</sup> J.C. Ryle observed, "No earthly condition appears to be so deadening to a man's soul as the position of a resident fellow of a college, and the society of a common room at Oxford or Cambridge." J.C. Ryle, *The Christian Leaders of the Last Century or England a Hundred Years Ago*. (Moscow: Charles Nolan Publishers, 2002), 201.

power.”<sup>6</sup> Despite his continued efforts, Berridge concluded that his work at Stapleford was largely a failure because “the wicked continued wicked still; the careless continued careless still.”<sup>7</sup>

Little improved for Berridge when, on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1755 he was presented in the gift of Clare Hall with the living of St. Mary’s, Everton-cum-Tetworth. Again, Berridge pressed in on his small rural congregation the need for sanctification and regeneration but with no apparent results. After two years, Berridge was deeply discouraged and began to seriously question whether the problem did not lie within himself. One night, in desperation, Berridge prayed, “Lord, if I am right, keep me so; if I am not right, make me so. Lead me to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus.”<sup>8</sup>

The turning point for Berridge came around Christmas, 1757. Deeply aware that something was seriously wrong with both his own spiritual state and the spiritual condition of his parish, Berridge prayed fervently for ten consecutive days for a breakthrough. To his surprise and relief, the breakthrough did indeed come. Writing on July 3, 1758, Berridge describes his experience:

After about ten days crying unto the Lord, he was pleased to return an answer to my prayers, and in the following wonderful manner. As I was sitting in my house one morning, and musing upon a text of Scripture, the following words were darted into my mind with wonderful power, and seemed like a voice from heaven, viz., “Cease from thine own works.” Before I heard these words, my mind was in a very unusual calm; but as soon as I heard them, my soul was in a tempest directly, and the tears flowed from my eyes like a torrent. The scales fell from mine eyes immediately, and I now clearly saw the rock I had been splitting

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<sup>6</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone” in Berridge, *Works*, 345.

<sup>7</sup> Berridge, *Works*, xiii.

<sup>8</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone” in Berridge, *Works*, 346.

on for near thirty years. Do you ask what this rock was? Why, it was some secret reliance on my own works for salvation.<sup>9</sup>

In hindsight, Berridge realized that he had been calling his congregation to a place of sanctification without first journeying through the saving work of Christ on the Cross. Berridge had “thought that sanctification was the way to justification” but was now convinced that latter ought to precede the former. The secret to the Christian life, Berridge had discovered, lay not in moralism or living a good life but rather in centering one’s life *completely* in the work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. In a series of letters entitled *Justification by Faith Alone* dated July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1758 Berridge expressed his new understanding of conversion in terms akin to that of the Puritan *Golden Chain*.

Conversion, to Berridge, required passing through the following five steps:

1. One is convinced by the Holy Spirit of one’s utter sinfulness;
2. One is convinced that one is a child of wrath on account of birth-sin;
3. One is convinced one is under the curse of God because of actual sin;
4. Under these convictions, one comes to Jesus Christ renouncing all self-righteousness and relying on Jesus Christ and his atonement for all our righteousness;
5. One recognizes that only Christ is able to remove all our burdens.

Later in the same work, Berridge summarizes his recent discovery by writing, “But, dear Sir, Christ will either be a whole Saviour or none at all.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone” in Berridge, *Works*, 346.

<sup>10</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone” in Berridge, *Works*, 347-349.

From this point, Berridge began to preach the doctrine of justification by faith. This produced immediate effects within his congregation. The parishioners in Everton, however, were unused to this new form of preaching and were in Berridge's words, "surprised, alarmed and vexed."<sup>11</sup> After a couple of Sundays of hearing Berridge preach, one of Berridge's parishioners inquired of this new manner of preaching. A woman named Sarah commented to Berridge that these "new sermons" were affecting her a great deal. When asked why, she said, "I find we are all to be lost now. I can neither eat, drink, nor sleep. I don't know what's to become of me."<sup>12</sup> In the ensuing weeks, more parishioners approached Berridge with similar concerns.

After eight years of pastoring, Berridge sensed he had been given a new beginning. To mark this, he promptly burned all of his past sermons and began to preach extempore.<sup>13</sup> Within a short interval, Berridge began to witness what he believed were the consequences this new doctrine. Parishioners began to ask Berridge, "What must I do to be saved?" In response, Berridge said, "[I]f they found themselves under the curse, Christ was ready to deliver them from it; if they were really weary and heavy laden, Christ would give them rest; if their hearts were broken for sin, and they would look up unto Christ, he would heal them."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone" in Berridge, *Works*, 351.

<sup>12</sup> Berridge, *Works*, xiv.

<sup>13</sup> Berridge's first experience of extempore preaching happened accidentally. On a Sabbath evening, Berridge had journeyed to preach a sermon. Not expecting to know anyone there, Berridge had planned to simply re-preach his morning message. To his dismay, he learned that one of his parishioners was planning to accompany him on the journey and hear him preach. To make matters worse, the congregation that had gathered to hear him preach was much greater than he had anticipated. In the end, Berridge approached the pulpit and preached his first extemporaneous sermon. Thankfully, the result was positive and Berridge was encouraged to preach in a similar fashion from then on. Berridge, *Works*, xv.

<sup>14</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone" in Berridge, *Works*, 351.

By the spring of 1758, Berridge's preaching was beginning to have a widening effect. Martin Madan (1726-1790) wrote to John Wesley about what was happening in Everton. In his letter, Madan quotes a letter to a Mr. Daw from Berridge describing the recent changes occurring in his Everton parish. He writes:

God has been pleased to bless and prosper my labours in a very extraordinary manner, for these last three months. Since I preached the real gospel of Christ, seven people in my own parish have now received the gospel in the appointed way of repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. Nine or ten from Potton are in a very hopeful way, two at Gamlingay and two at Eaton. There is now such a storm arising that I know not how it will end, or when.

Not everyone, however, welcomed the changes that the "real gospel of Christ" was making in Everton. Berridge continues:

My 'Squire swears he will do my business; and last Lord's-day evening, when I came from church, he stopped me, and called me the usual names of Enthusiast, etc. etc. To-day, I hear the 'Squire has sent for such of his tenants as are disposed to hear the word of God, and has given them warning to leave their farms directly. He tells all what things he will do, against me; and to shew he is in earnest, swears by his Maker, *he will do it.*<sup>15</sup>

One local clergy was especially affronted by "the apostle of Clare Hall" as Berridge was becoming known. Mr. Samuel Hicks of Wrestlingworth, a village four miles from Everton, was so distraught over Berridge's preaching that he denied the sacrament to all in his congregation who went to hear Berridge preach. Ironically, it was not long before Hicks also experienced convictions over his actions and before the end of 1758 was not only preaching the same gospel as Berridge but would also become an important partner with him in the ensuing revival.

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<sup>15</sup> Charles Smyth, *Simeon and Church Order* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 163-164.



Writing in the summer of 1758, Berridge reflected on the amazing changes he had experienced over the past year. He wrote:

I preached up sanctification very earnestly for six years in a former parish, and never brought one soul to Christ. I did the same at this parish for two years, without any success at all, but as soon as ever I preached Jesus Christ, and faith in his blood, then believers were added to the church continually, then people flocked from all parts to hear the glorious sound of the gospel, some coming six miles, others eight, and others ten, and that constantly.<sup>16</sup>

The trickle of conversions Berridge witnessed soon became a flood. Before long, stories of the changes experienced by the vicar of Everton and his new manner of preaching began to spread throughout the surrounding counties.

By June, 1758, news reached neighboring Bedford and the ears of a converted deist turned local Methodist preacher named John Walsh. Hearing the reports of conversions, Walsh wrote to John Wesley and informed him of the growing numbers of conversions in and around Everton and encouraged him to pay the town a visit. Walsh wrote that this Berridge “had read several of our works, and greatly longs to see you....He meets little companies of his Converts from several towns and villages, at his own house. He was once ashamed of the word Methodist, but takes it to himself now as freely as I do. The country seems to kindle round him.”<sup>17</sup>

Once month later, George Whitefield (1714-1770) himself visited Everton and preached there – the first of many occasions. In his journal, Whitefield wrote, “All the last week was taken up in preaching at Everton, Saint Neots, Keysoe, Bedford, Oulney,

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<sup>16</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone” in Berridge, *Works*, 351.

<sup>17</sup> Smyth, *Church Order*, 164.

Weston Underwood, Ravenstone and Northampton...Mr. Berridge who was lately awakened at Everton promises to be a burning and shining light.”<sup>18</sup>

On November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1758, Wesley paid Berridge his first visit and preached in the evening and the following morning at his church. What Wesley witnessed affected the Methodist founder greatly. He wrote in his journal the following entry:

Mr. Parker informing me that Mr. Berridge desired I would come to him as soon as possible, I set out for Everton on Thursday 9. I found Mr B[erridge] taking horse, with whom I rode on, and in the evening preached at Wrestlingworth in a large church, well filled with serious hearers.

We lodged at Mr. Hicks’s, the vicar, a witness of the faith which once he persecuted. The next morning I preached in his church again. In the middle of the sermon a woman before me dropped down as dead, as one had done the night before. In a short time she came to herself and remained deeply sensible of her want of Christ.

Hence we rode to Mr. B[erridge]’s at Everton. For many years he was seeking to be justified by his works. But a few months ago he was thoroughly convinced that ‘by grace we are saved through faith.’ Immediately he began to proclaim aloud the redemption that is in Jesus. And God confirmed his own word, exactly as he did at Bristol in the beginning, by working repentance and faith in the hearers, and with the same violent outward symptoms.<sup>19</sup>

What were these *violent outward symptoms* Wesley was witnessing? Given what would take place in Everton and the surrounding counties over the next year, these “symptoms” were just the early signs of what has been termed the “Evangelical Revival in Cambridgeshire”.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Nigel R. Pibworth, *The Gospel Pedlar: The Story of John Berridge and the Eighteenth-Century Revival* (Hertfordshire, UK: Evangelical Press, 1987), 41.

<sup>19</sup> John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Volume 21 – Journal and Diaries IV (1755-1765)*, eds. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), 171.

<sup>20</sup> Smyth, *Church Order*, 164.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### REVIVAL BREAKS OUT

The *violent outward symptoms* that John Wesley described at the end of 1758 turned out to be the first indications of a revival which would break out during the summer of the following year. On March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1759, Wesley visited Everton to meet with John Berridge. Though the vicar was away that day, Wesley preached in Berridge's house. The next night saw the church filled to overflowing to hear the Methodist preacher. It seems that through these visitations, Wesley was beginning to be impressed by the ministry and work of his new friend. In fact, in a letter to Lady Huntingdon, Wesley gave the following assessment of Berridge, "Mr. Berridge appears to be one of the most simple as well as most sensible men of all whom it pleased God to employ in reviving primitive Christianity...His word is with power; he speaks a plain and home as John Nelson, but with all the propriety of Romaine and the tenderness of Mr. Hervey."<sup>1</sup>

The admiration between the two was mutual and Wesley's impact in Berridge's life was felt immediately. For example, Wesley encouraged Berridge to begin itinerating in the area surrounding Everton. Berridge's first sermon outdoors was preached on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1759 of which he writes:

On Monday se'nnight Mr. Hicks accompanied me to Meldred. On the way we called at a farm-house. After dinner I went into the yard, and seeing nearly a hundred and fifty people, I called for a table, and preached, for the first time, in the open air. We then went to Meldred, where I preached in a field, to about four thousand people. In the morning, at five, Mr. Hicks preached, in the same field, to about a thousand. Here the presence of the Lord was wonderfully

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<sup>1</sup> John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Volume 21 – Journal and Diaries IV (1755-1765)*, eds. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), 224fn.

among us, and, I trust, besides many that were slightly wounded, nearly thirty received heart-felt conviction.<sup>2</sup>

To Berridge and Hicks, the decision to itinerate seemed to mark the beginning of a series of remarkable events that would take place in the ensuing months in Everton and the surrounding countryside. In particular, what occurred during the late spring of 1759 in Everton and its region was extraordinary and so impressed Wesley that he made notes in his journal describing in detail how the work of God exceedingly increased during this time. He writes, "About this time the work of God exceedingly increased under the Rev. Mr. Berridge, near Everton. I cannot give a clearer view of this, than by transcribing part of the journal of an eye witness." The eye witness was a Mrs. Blackwell whose report seems to have been focused on the events occurring the week of May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1759.<sup>3</sup>

On Sunday, May 20<sup>th</sup>, Mr. and Mrs. Blackwell visited Everton and heard Berridge preach. According to the account, many listeners, both young and old "cried out" during the meeting including a young girl, who Mrs. Blackwell described as being "in violent contortions of body, and weeping aloud" throughout the entire service. The church itself was at capacity and a large crowd had gathered outside. So great were the outcries throughout the sermon that it was at times difficult to hear the vicar's voice.

Crowds were growing with an increasing number of people traveling from outlying areas to hear Berridge preach. Some hearers set out at two in the morning and

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<sup>2</sup> John Berridge, *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Berridge, A.M., with a Memoir of his life by the Rev. Richard Whittingham* (London: Paternoster Row, 1864), xvi.

<sup>3</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, Volume 21, 195.

made the thirteen mile trek arriving just in time to hear Berridge. His text that morning was 2 Timothy 3:5, *Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof*. During the message, Berridge began to speak on the power of true religion in a believers' life. Blackwell describes what then happened:

When the power of religion began to be spoken of, the presence of God really filled the place. And while poor sinners felt the sentence of death in their souls, what sounds of distress did I hear! The greatest number of them who cried or fell, were men: but some women, and several children, felt the power of the same almighty Spirit, and seemed just sinking into hell. This occasioned a mixture of various sounds; some shrieking, some roaring aloud. The most general was a loud breathing, like that of people half strangled and gasping for life. And indeed almost all the cries were like those of human creatures, dying in bitter anguish. Great numbers wept without any noise: others fell down as dead, some sinking in silence, some with extreme noise and violent agitation.

Mrs. Blackwell and her husband were not unmoved by the message. Upon witnessing a young man and a little girl in the opposite pew shake and fall to the floor, she writes, "When he fell, Mr. B[lackwell] and I felt our souls thrilled with a momentary dread, as when one man is killed by a cannon-ball, another often feels the wind of it."

Throughout the day, Berridge continued to preach, wearily returning to his house only to find it full of people. Though tired, Berridge offered "a word of exhortation" with similar effect. Exhausted, Berridge retired to bed yet Mrs. Blackwell remarked that they "continued praising God with all our might: and his work went on as when Mr. B[erridge] was exhorting."

On Thursday, May 24<sup>th</sup>, the Blackwells visited Mr. Hicks at Wrestlingworth just four miles from Everton. As both Berridge and Hicks preached, again the results were astonishing. This time the outcries were so deafening that "the loudest singing could

scarcely be heard.” Things abated somewhat during a time of prayer only to be raised to a fevered pitch again after a short interval.

Such ecstatic phenomena seemed to accompany Berridge and Hicks whenever and wherever they preached. The revival, according to Blackwell spread very quickly and had extended deep into Cambridgeshire “to within a mile of the university, and about as far into Huntingdonshire, but flourishes most of all in the Eastern and Northern parts of Bedfordshire.”

Indeed, what was witnessed that week did have *violent outward symptoms* leaving a number of the churches in which Berridge preached with broken pews and benches. Listeners, if not moved within the church service itself, were often affected after they left the church with some being “found lying as dead on the road, others in Mr. B[erridge]’s garden, not being able to walk from the church to his house...”<sup>4</sup>

On Monday, May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1759, a very fatigued Berridge and his gospel partner, Samuel Hicks made the journey to Shelford, a small village four miles outside of Everton. Though weak and ill from riding, what Berridge witnessed upon his arrival moved him deeply. He described the scene before him:

When I came thither, a table was set for me on the common; and to my great surprise, I found nearly ten thousand people round it, among whom were many gowmsmen from Cambridge. I was hardly able to stand on my feet, and extremely hoarse with a cold. When I lifted up my foot, to get on the table, a horrible dread overwhelmed me. But the moment I was fixed thereon, I seemed as unconcerned as a statue, I gave out my text (Gal. 3:10-11) and made a pause to think of something pretty to set off with, but the Lord so confounded me, (as indeed it was meet, for I was seeking, not his glory, but my own) that I was in a perfect labyrinth and found if I did not begin immediately I must go down without speaking. So I broke out with the first word that occurred, not knowing

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<sup>4</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, 195-199.

whether I should be able to add any more. Then the Lord opened my mouth, enabling me to speak nearly an hour, without any kind of perplexity and so loud that every one might hear. The audience behaved with great decency. When sermon was over I found myself so cool and easy, so cheerful in spirit, and wonderfully strengthened in body, I went into a house and spoke again nearly an hour to about two hundred people. In the morning I preached again to about a thousand; Mr. H[icks] engaged to preach in Orwell-field on Tuesday evening. I gave notice that I designed to preach on Monday sennight at Grandchester, a mile from Cambridge.<sup>5</sup>

Word of the revival quickly spread throughout the area. As a result, Berridge began to itinerate with even greater frequency visiting up to twenty towns and villages dotted around the countryside. In his itinerancy, Berridge visited the counties of Bedford, Cambridge, Essex, Hertford, and Huntingdon. Berridge's curate, Richard Whittingham noted the gruelling schedule that the vicar kept at the time, "In this circuit he preached, upon an average, from ten to twelve sermons a-week, and frequently rode a hundred miles.<sup>6</sup> It soon became obvious that Berridge did not have the same itinerating stamina as his friend John Wesley and the strenuous effects of continuous itineration would eventually have a negative impact on his long-term health.

What captured Wesley's interest seems to have been the ecstatic expression associated with the conversions being reported. As a result, he devoted considerable space in his journal to describing the strange phenomena witnessed that summer. In addition to Mrs. Blackwell's account, Wesley also included a letter from a converted deist from London named John Walsh.

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<sup>5</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, 199-200.

<sup>6</sup> Berridge, *Works*, xxiv.

Walsh notes that the ecstatic phenomena being experienced in Everton and the surrounding countryside had caught the attention of the early evangelical leader and benefactor, Selina, Countess of Huntingdon (1707-1791) who, in turn, dispatched two of her preachers to investigate the sensational reports which had come to her attention. Upon arriving to Everton, both William Romaine and Martin Madan displayed initial scepticism of the reports that had been given.

Walsh describes the visit of Madan and Romaine on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1759. He journals that both Madan and Romaine met with a young woman named Ann Thorn “who told [Madan] of much heaviness following the visions with which she had been favoured, but said, she was, at intervals, visited still with so much overpowering love and joy, especially at the Lord's-Supper, that she often lay in a trance for many hours.” Walsh continues by noting that Madan initially doubted the authenticity of what he was witnessing writing, “So it was to Mr. M[adan], who doubted whether God or the devil had filled her with love and praise.” Romaine, however “was filled with a solemn awe.”<sup>7</sup> Eventually both men were convinced though maintained some deep concerns about the revival and the “wild-fire of enthusiasm” that accompanied it.<sup>8</sup>

Walsh’s journal extracts describe in vivid detail the nature of the ecstatic events taking place during the summer of 1759. To gain an appreciation of how extraordinary these phenomena were, many of the descriptions are worth exploring. Of particular

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<sup>7</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, 211.

<sup>8</sup> Walsh writes on Friday, July 13<sup>th</sup>, “Mr. R[omaine], as well as Mr. M[adan], was in doubt concerning the work of God here. But this morning they were both fully convinced...” A. Seymour, *Life and Times of Selina Countess of Huntingdon Volume One* (London, 1839), 398. See also Wesley, *Journal*, 213.



importance is an extract Walsh obtains from Hick's journal which describes a particular event taking place on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1759. The journal entry reads as follows:

June 6, 1759, I spoke this morning at Orwell, on Isaiah 55:1. One who had been before convinced of sin, fell down in a kind of fit, and broke out, in great anguish of soul, calling on the Lord Jesus for salvation. He wrought as in the agonies of death, and was quite bathed in sweat. He beat the chair against which he kneeled, as one whose soul drew nigh unto hell. His countenance then cleared up at once, and we hoped he would be presently set at liberty; but, on a sudden, he was more distressed than ever, being in the sharpest conflict, every muscle of his body was in strong agitation, as if nature were just dissolving. I never saw any convulsion-fit so violent. But, in a moment God dispelled the cloud; his face was again covered with smiles; and he spake, as seeing the Lord near him. He cried unto him, and the Lord hearing, pronounced him freely forgiven. At that instant he clapped his hands, and cried aloud, 'Jesus is mine! He is my Saviour!' His soul was in peace; neither did he find the least bodily pain or soreness. I asked, 'For what would you undergo this again?' He said, 'Not for all the world: but I would suffer more, rather than be without Christ: yea, for his sake, I would suffer all things!' 'An unwise man doth not consider this: a fool doth not understand it.'<sup>9</sup>

From July 15<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1759, Walsh accompanied Berridge and Hicks as they preached from town to town. Wherever they visited, the same kind of extraordinary phenomena was experienced. Some of the ecstatic expressions bordered on the bizarre. For example, Walsh describes what happened when Berridge preached on Saturday, the 14<sup>th</sup> of July in the town of Grandchester. Here, Berridge preached to a full church with people gathered outside in the Church-yard. As he preached, Walsh could hear many "panting and gasping after eternal life." By the afternoon, the crowds had grown so much that Berridge was entreated to preach outside in his Close. As he preached, many fell to the ground, others tottered and trembled. In his journal, Walsh writes of "one woman [who] tore up the ground with her hands, filling them with dust and with the hard-trodden grass; on which I saw her lie, with her hands clinched, as one dead, when

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<sup>9</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, 212-213.

the multitude dispersed.” Many who had gathered were “overwhelmed with joy and life eternal” but looked “as if they were dead.” As a result, they were carried into the house where only then would they arouse and express “a rapture of praise, intermixed with a small joyous laughter.”<sup>10</sup>

On July 18<sup>th</sup>, Berridge returned to Stapleford, the town in which he served as a curate for six years. It must have been quite the sight for his former parishioners to witness their former curate turned revivalist preacher! Walsh makes this observation when he writes, “We met Mr. Berridge at Stapleford, five miles from Cambridge. His heart was particularly set on this people, because he was Curate here five or six years, but never preached a gospel sermon among them till this evening.”<sup>11</sup> That evening, a huge crowd came out to hear their former pastor preach. However, not all those who gathered to hear Berridge favoured his new manner of preaching.

About fifteen hundred persons met in a Close to hear him, great part of whom were laughers and mockers. The work of God, however, quickly began among those that were serious: while not a few endeavoured to make sport, by mimicking the gestures of those that were wounded. Both these and those who rejoiced in God, gave great offence to some stern looking men, who vehemently demanded to have those wretches horse-whipped out of the Close. Need we wonder at this, when several of his own people, are unwilling to let God work in his own way?<sup>12</sup>

On Thursday, July 19<sup>th</sup>, Berridge returned to Grandchester to a gathering of about one thousand people. One Mr. Jennings had set out at four in the morning to arrive in time to hear Berridge speak.<sup>13</sup> Upon hearing Berridge, Jennings cried out, “I

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<sup>10</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, 213-214.

<sup>11</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, 216.

<sup>12</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, 216.

<sup>13</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, 217.

thought I had led a good life! I thought I was not so bad as others! But I am the vilest creature upon earth! I am dropping into hell! Now, now: this very moment!" Thereupon, Jennings described seeing hell open up below him and Satan ready to throw him in. But before long, assurance came to him and Walsh writes, "[B]ut it was not long before he saw the Lord Jesus, and knew he had accepted him. He then cried aloud in an unspeakable rapture, 'I have got Christ! I have got Christ!' For two hours he was in the visions of God. Then the joy, tho' not the peace, abated."<sup>14</sup>

Wherever Berridge preached, large crowds continued to gather. In Tripplow, two thousand people assembled in the Close to hear Berridge. In response to what was heard, people were affected with "sighs and groans, prayers, tears, and joyful praise being intermixed on every side."<sup>15</sup> On Friday, July 20<sup>th</sup>, Walsh notes that he was so fatigued that he had a difficult time getting out of bed. Berridge, however, had been up half the night praying with people who had come to hear him preach. Going on alone, Berridge returned that day to Everton. When Walsh arrived at Everton, he heard Berridge preaching and experienced himself spiritual refreshment.

On Sunday, July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1759, Berridge preached at his church in Everton. Not surprisingly, the church was filled to overflowing with Berridge's message affecting many who were listening. Walsh writes, "And now the arrows of God flew abroad, the inexpressible groans, the lamenting, praying, roaring, were so loud, almost without intermission, that we who stood without, could scarcely help thinking, all in the Church were cut to the heart. But upon inquiry, we found, about two hundred persons, chiefly

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<sup>14</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, 218.

<sup>15</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, 218.

men, cried aloud for mercy: but many more were affected, perhaps as deeply, though in a calmer way.”<sup>16</sup>

The “calmer way” that Walsh notes on the 22<sup>nd</sup> seems to have been an indicator that the fervour of the revival and the paroxysms associated with it were finally beginning to abate. On August 6<sup>th</sup>, Wesley visited Everton and interviewed two women on their trance experiences.<sup>17</sup> Later that night, Wesley preached at Berridge’s church and noted that the “whole congregation was earnestly attentive. But not above one or two cried out. And I did not observe any that fainted away, either then or in the morning.”<sup>18</sup>

In November that year, Wesley again visited Everton and noticed a difference “as to the manner of the work” since he was last there. There were no trances, “none cried out, none fell down or were convulsed.” Visiting Samuel Hick’s church in Wrestlingworth, again Wesley observed that “none were so affected as when I was here last.”<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps the finale of the revival occurred when Lady Huntingdon paid Everton a visit sometime late in 1759. Accompanied by Martin Madan and Henry Venn, for three days the two men along with Berridge and Hicks preached to ever increasing crowds which culminated at over ten thousand people. The final sermon of the third day was

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<sup>16</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, 219.

<sup>17</sup> With regards to the nature and genuineness of their experiences, Wesley concludes, “1. that when they ‘went away’ as they termed it, it was always at the time they were fullest of the love of God; 2. that it came upon them in a moment, without any previous notice, and took away all their senses and strength; 3. that there were some exceptions, but generally from that moment they were in another world, knowing nothing of what was done or said by all that were round about them.” Wesley, *Journal*, 222.

<sup>18</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, 223.

<sup>19</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, 234-235.

given by Berridge himself who challenge the people to behold the Lamb of God. The sermon was given with great power, but the response of the crowds differed from earlier during the revival. Rather than being affected by paroxysms and ecstatic phenomena, the crowds responded with solemn silence followed by the singing of one of Charles Wesley's "noblest hymns".<sup>20</sup>

Following this, Berridge accompanied Lady Huntingdon back to London for a short while in order to meet her friends and to preach for George Whitefield in his City Tabernacle. In many ways, this event marked the end of what was a remarkable year in Cambridgeshire. In terms of sheer numbers, reports claimed that somewhere between 2000-4000 conversions were experienced over a twelve-month period.<sup>21</sup> As 1759 drew to a conclusion, it had become clear to all those involved that the revival fires that had burned throughout that summer and autumn had begun to finally die out. The event known as the Cambridgeshire Revival had drawn to a close.

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<sup>20</sup> Seymour, *Countess of Huntingdon, Volume One*, 400.

<sup>21</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, 213. Berridge, *Works*, xxvi.

## CHAPTER SIX

### INTERPRETING THE CAMBRIDGESHIRE REVIVAL

How are we to understand what transpired throughout the months of 1759?

The ecstatic behaviour and instances of paroxysm occurring during the Cambridgeshire Revival sound at times strange and even bizarre to modern ears. Part of the interpretive challenge lies in the fact that we do not have any record of the content of the sermons that John Berridge or Samuel Hicks delivered that summer. Another difficulty stems from Berridge's own reticence to reflect on the events of that summer.<sup>1</sup> Lack of primary materials notwithstanding, given the evidence that is available regarding the events during and surrounding the revival, *six observations* can be made.

First, *it was through the medium of preaching that Berridge's ministry during the revival was most impactful*. Many who knew Berridge well and had listened to his preaching commented on Berridge's strong preaching voice. During the final days of the revival, John Walsh offers this observation, "Mr. B[erridge] preached in his Close this afternoon, though in great bodily weakness. But when he is weakest, God so strengthens him, that it is surprising to what a distance his voice reaches. I have heard Mr. Whitefield speak as loud, but not with such a continued, strong, unbroken tenor."<sup>2</sup> Berridge's curate, Richard Whittingham concurred. He noted that Berridge's preaching voice was "strong and loud; but perfectly under command. The numbers that

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<sup>1</sup> This will be explored below.

<sup>2</sup> John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Volume 21 – Journal and Diaries IV (1755-1765)*, eds. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 220.

sometimes heard him were very great. Ten or fifteen thousand at some places composed his congregation; and he was well heard by all of them.”<sup>3</sup>

Not only did Berridge possess a strong preaching voice, his style of sermon delivery was also noteworthy. Describing his vicar’s preaching style, Whittingham remarked that Berridge spoke in a manner that communicated “gravity, without grimace; his address was solemn, but not sour; easy, but not careless; deliberate, but not drawling; pointed, but not personal; affectionate, but not fawning...Upon the whole his manner and person were agreeable and majestic.”<sup>4</sup>

Part of the apparent attractiveness of Berridge’s preaching was related to his willingness to use humorous anecdotes and homey illustrations in his sermons to communicate to his hearers. In doing so, Berridge displayed an important pastoral quality: he understood the hearts of his people. Though university educated and well-learned, Berridge often preached in a way that the illiterate rural folk in and around Everton could readily understand. J.C. Ryle underlines this point by writing about Berridge, “Odd and unrefined as his illustrations often were, they were just the kind of thing that arrests and keeps up the attention of rural hearers.”<sup>5</sup> On one occasion, Berridge encouraged a young pastor filling his pulpit to preach to the parishioners with clarity and plainness of style. Unfortunately, the young pastor did not heed Berridge words. Thereupon, Berridge exhorted him, “Brother R--- your sermon was good, but my people cannot understand your language. You have endeavoured to prove that God is

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<sup>3</sup> John Berridge, *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Berridge, A.M., with a Memoir of his life by the Rev. Richard Whittingham* (London: Paternoster Row, 1864), xxv.

<sup>4</sup> Berridge, *Works*, xx.

<sup>5</sup> J.C. Ryle, *The Christian Leaders of the Last Century*, (Moscow: Charles Nolan Publishers, 2002), 222.

omniscient and omnipotent; but if you had said, that God was almighty, and knew every thing, they would have understood you.”<sup>6</sup>

Second, *Berridge's central role in the Cambridgeshire Revival elicited much opposition*. Berridge's decision to itinerate caused great indignation and embarrassment particularly among his friends back at Cambridge. In an extract from *Dyer's History of the University and Colleges of Cambridge*, it noted that Berridge's decision to itinerate had given “great offense to the University” and “his manner was deemed very eccentric.”<sup>7</sup> In one case, the Master of Corpus Christi College and Dean of Lincoln, a Mr. John Green was extremely critical of Berridge and the ecstatic phenomena associated with his preaching. In a pamphlet responding to Berridge's *Justification by Faith Alone*, Green harshly evaluated Berridge and his role in the “revival” by writing:

I am disposed to think well of your good meaning, yet there are many appearances in your conduct, if credit may be given to some of your hearers, which look a little untoward, and are difficult to be accounted for; you are attended it seems in those frequent harangues, with a constant number of groaners, fighters, tumblers and convulsionists. These occasionally break out into such a dreadful concert of screams, howlings and lamentations, as surprises and shocks the sober part of your audience, who are in doubt whether to ascribe those sudden explosions to the catching nature of enthusiasm, or the unusual power of methodistical oratory. You are reported to use on these occasions some strange expressions which, accompanied with a loud tone of voice, vehement gesture, wild looks, and that terrible relieve which is sometimes given to the cheeks and eyes of a field-preacher, must strongly operate on weak minds, and strike terror into an ignorant and unexperienced multitude.<sup>8</sup>

Green's main criticism of Berridge was that he preached in a manner to *promote* ecstasy and paroxysmal behaviour. At one point, Green maintained that one of Berridge's

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<sup>6</sup> Berridge, *Works*, xlvii.

<sup>7</sup> Berridge, *Works*, xliii.

<sup>8</sup> Nigel R. Pibworth, *The Gospel Pedlar: The Story of John Berridge and the Eighteenth-Century Revival* (Welwyn, Hertfordshire: Evangelical Press, 1987), 64-65.



hearers reported that he was encouraging ecstatic behavior by saying, "Fall! Won't you fall! Why don't you fall? Better fall here, than fall into hell." It is uncertain how much credence one should place in such hearsay evidence from a hostile observer. J.C. Ryle was not persuaded. In his work on Berridge, Ryle doubted the reliability of the source and noted that Berridge neither encouraged ecstatic phenomena nor did he ever view such behaviour as a necessary mark of conversion.<sup>9</sup>

Third, *ecstatic phenomena were witnessed throughout the Cambridgeshire Revival and remained a prevailing characteristic until its end.* As has been shown, most eyewitness accounts of the revival describe strange and bizarre behaviour of those on the receiving end of Berridge's preaching. How can one account for the *violent agonies*, the trances, groans, roaring, paralysis, visions of heaven and hell, shouting, laughing and crying that seemed to arise every time Berridge spoke publicly? It is important to note that phenomena of this sort did have historical precedence. Both the late seventeenth-century and the early part of the eighteenth-century witnessed similar paroxysms on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1739, John Wesley witnessed shouting, groaning, paralysis and convulsions during a Methodist society meeting in Bristol. Cases like this continued to follow Wesley during the ensuing years. In his own reflection on the matter, Wesley himself concluded in 1744 that such ecstatic expressions were evidence of the conviction of sin (though he oscillated back and forth in attributing the cause to either God or the devil).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See Pibworth, *Gospel Pedlar*, 67. See also Ryle, *Christian Leaders*, 207.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Rack, *Rational Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 2002), 195-197.

Many in Berridge's day were also unsure over whether what was being witnessed was not so much a work of God, but the work of the devil. John Walsh witnessed this very uncertainty and noted as much in his journal, "I was troubled for some of our brethren, who began to doubt whether this was a work of God or of the devil." <sup>11</sup>

Indeed, it is a significant challenge for the church historian to interpret the strange and extreme phenomena which seemed to go along with the revival? Though modern psychological interpretations especially pertaining to crowd psychology or mass hysteria may offer some degree of understanding of the events surrounding the revival, the field of theology may also be of some benefit. In fact, Reformer Martin Luther offers such a theological interpretation when he once wrote of the effects of repentance in the life of a believer:

Repentance which is occupied with thoughts of peace is hypocrisy. There must be a great earnestness about it and a deep hurt if the old man is to be put off. When lightning strikes a tree or a man, it does two things at once, - it rends the tree and slays the man, but it also turns the face of the dead man and the broken branches of the dead tree to itself, toward heaven. So the grace of God terrifies and pursues and drives a man, but turns him at the same time to Himself.<sup>12</sup>

Both Wesley and Berridge would have agreed with Luther's observations. The theological lens through which they understood the *violent outward symptoms* associated with a revival's beginnings was intricately connected to the dynamics of repentance. The process of repentance was expressed primarily in terms of deep,

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<sup>11</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, 219.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Charles Smyth, *Simeon and Church Order* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 166-167.

difficult spiritual struggle - as Satan “tearing” at God’s people as they came to Christ.<sup>13</sup>

To Berridge and Wesley, wherever and whenever one finds an unclaimed territory in the process of being “claimed” for the cause of Christ, Satan will rage and with great violence attempt to retain his hold upon the land. This phenomenon seems to be what both men had in mind when they encountered ecstatic behaviour during the revival. In a letter Berridge wrote to Mrs. Blackwell, he describes those affected as being “miserably torn by Satan.” Walsh, too, reflects on what was occurring in Stapleford by writing, “And well may Satan be enraged at the cries of the people, and the prayers they make in the bitterness of their souls, seeing we know these are the chief times at which Satan is cast out.”<sup>14</sup>

On reflecting on the revival fires of the summer of 1759, Wesley offered the following concluding thoughts: “I have generally observed more or less of these outward symptoms to attend the beginning of a general work of God. So it was in New England, Scotland, Holland, Ireland, and many parts of England. But after a time they gradually decrease, and the work goes on more quietly and silently.”<sup>15</sup>

Reflecting on the genuineness of the Cambridgeshire Revival, Wesley, ever the “reasonable enthusiast”, observed that in interpreting the events of the Cambridgeshire Revival, the danger lay not in overemphasizing the “extraordinary circumstances”, but rather in regarding them too little.<sup>16</sup> The truth lay in recognizing that first, when God convicts sinners, such physical responses as “sudden outcries and strong bodily

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<sup>13</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, 199.

<sup>14</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, 216.

<sup>15</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, 223.

<sup>16</sup> See Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 196-197.

convulsions” were to be expected. Second, God often strengthens a new convert’s resolve through gifts of dreams, trances, and visions. Third, Wesley acknowledged that often it is difficult to separate the genuine from the natural and that Satan often imitates the work of God in an effort to discredit the entire work. In the end, Wesley concluded that the revival was at first “wholly from God. It is partly so at this day. And he will enable us to discern how far in every case the work is pure, and where it mixes or degenerates.”<sup>17</sup>

Fourth, *young people played an important role in the revival itself*. During the course of the revival, we repeatedly find young men and women affected deeply and being the subjects of much discussion and reflection. Mrs. Blackwell’s account described that “among the children” one found specific instances of boys as young as eight years old being impacted by the revival. Young girls aged twelve or thirteen were “deeply wounded and as desirous of salvation as any” as were “three justified children.”<sup>18</sup> Walsh offered an account of a twenty-one year old, Ann Thorn, who experienced visions and an “Ann Simpson, aged sixteen or seventeen who lay nearly an hour in the utmost distress, shrieking out, ‘Christ! Christ!’”<sup>19</sup>

The centrality of children in the Cambridgeshire Revival may, at first glance, seem unusual but when it is placed within the larger historical context of revival in eighteenth-century Europe, the Evangelical Revival and the Great Awakening, a common theme begins to develop. As early as 1708, one finds children playing a key

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<sup>17</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, 234.

<sup>18</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, 197-199.

<sup>19</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, 211-212.

role in a revival occurring in Silesia (along the Czech-Polish border). This revival was even aptly named, “the uprising of the children.” Twenty years later, children once again stood at the centre of a revival which broke out in 1727 among refugees in Herrnhut. Count Ludwig Von Zinzendorf then took advantage of the revival to establish the Renewed Moravian Brethren. In 1734, the revival which broke out in Jonathan Edward’s Northampton broke out among young people at first. Even the greatest preacher of the Great Awakening and Evangelical Revival, George Whitefield, was called “the boy preacher” when he began preaching.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, to find children playing a prominent role in the Cambridgeshire Revival, though remarkable, was within the wider context of seventeenth and eighteenth-century revival history, not as unusual as modern readers might suspect.

*Fifth, Berridge’s perception of the revival and his role in it may have been affected by his shift from Arminianism to moderate Calvinism.*<sup>21</sup> Reading through Berridge’s letters, one must look hard to find any reference to the revival event that would have figured so prominently in his early pastoral life. In fact, it is not until ten years after the revival that we find two oblique references to the extraordinary events of that summer. In 1770, Berridge writes in a letter to Lady Huntingdon:

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<sup>20</sup> See Bruce Hindmarsh, *Let the Little Children Come to Me*, *Christian History*, May, 2009. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/byperiod/earlymodern/letthechildrencome.html> [accessed May 27, 2009].

<sup>21</sup> Moderate Calvinism represented a tempering of traditional Calvinist ideas and laid greater emphasis on the following: the importance of sound morality, a greater emphasis on human agency and responsibility, and ‘duty faith’ that is, the call to believe as a moral obligation. This last characteristic allowed Evangelical preachers to preach in such a way as to invite a response from the congregation as a whole. See David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 63-65.

You complain that every new work, after a season, becomes a lifeless work...Scripture mentions a former and a latter rain; between which there must of course be an interval of drought and barrenness. The former rain falls just after seed-time, when there is plenty of manna coming down from above, plenty of honey flowing out of the rock, and plenty of joyful hosannahs rising up to Jesus. After this rain comes the interval, during which most of the stony and thorny grounds sheer off...then comes the latter rain to revive and settle; after which they learn to walk humbly with God.<sup>22</sup>

Is the process on which Berridge is reflecting drawn from his own experience of revival in Everton? It seems likely. For, just months later, Berridge again writes to Lady Huntingdon and seems to concede that the revival which occurred ten years earlier had sorely tempted him towards pride. He confesses, "I cannot wish for transports, such as we once had, and which almost turned our heads; but I do long to see a spirit poured forth of triumphant faith, heavenly love, and steadfast cleaving to the Lord."<sup>23</sup> What accounts for the manner by which Berridge seems to downplay both the "transports" of the revival event and his own role in it?

Theologically, Berridge viewed himself as an Arminian during the immediate years following his conversion.<sup>24</sup> This changed when in 1767 Berridge fell seriously ill.<sup>25</sup> As a result of his illness, Berridge was incapacitated for three years with what he described as a "nervous fever." Being laid up for such a long time gave Berridge time to think and reflect deeply on his faith. In particular, Berridge discovered that the work of

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<sup>22</sup> "Letter to Lady Huntingdon, June 9, 1770" in Berridge, *Works*, 506-507.

<sup>23</sup> "Letter to Lady Huntingdon, March 23, 1770" in Berridge, *Works*, 507.

<sup>24</sup> Whittingham includes in the memoir of his vicar, a copy of Berridge's preface to a collection of hymns entitled 'A Collection of Divine Songs' published in 1760. In the preface, Berridge lays out a series of critiques of Calvinism. When Berridge became a Calvinist, he sought to buy up as many of the old copies of the hymnal as possible in order to destroy them. Berridge, *Works*, xxxiii.

<sup>25</sup> Berridge would suffer for most of his life with a form of asthma.

God in Everton, surprisingly, had not suffered much during his illness but had actually progressed somewhat.

These events led Berridge to the following conclusions: first, he began to realize the depth of his own sins, in particular, the sin of pride. In 1771, Berridge wrote to his friend, John Newton and described his recent experience. He writes:

In November I gathered strength enough to preach, and through mercy have continued preaching ever since...How little do we know of ourselves, of the pride, sensuality, and idolatry of our hearts, till the Lord lays us down on a bed, and searcheth all our inward parts round with his candles. My heart, I knew, was bad enough, but I scarcely thought there was half the baseness in it which I find, and yet I know not half its plague. How sweet is the mercy of God, and how rich is the grace of Jesus, when we have had an awful peep into our hearts!<sup>26</sup>

Second, Berridge recognized that the work of God could be “carried on without his agency, and was convinced of the divine sovereignty in the dispensations of grace and appointments to the sacred office.”<sup>27</sup> In short, Berridge realized that God did not need his help to carry out His divine work.

From this point onwards, Berridge shifted from Arminianism towards moderate Calvinism. His long-time friend, Henry Venn of neighbouring Yelling, noticed the change in Berridge when, in 1771 he wrote to the Rev. James Stillingfleet, “Last Wednesday, Mr. Berridge was here, and gave us a most excellent sermon. He is a blessed man – a true Calvinist; not hot in doctrine, nor wise above what is written, but practical and experimental.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> “Letter to John Newton, March 13, 1771” in Berridge, *Works*, 362-363.

<sup>27</sup> Berridge, *Works*, xvii.

<sup>28</sup> “Letter to the Rev. James Stillingfleet, November 22, 1771” in Henry Venn, *The Letters of Henry Venn* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1993), 191.

Though Berridge continued to respect the work of the Methodists, he now began to distance himself from their associations. As a result, he treated their work and their publications with growing caution. For example, in a letter dated September 20, 1776, Berridge gives the following advice to a young man, "Till you have a preacher to your mind, I think you should hear Mr. Wesley's preachers, and contribute towards them, but not be a member of their society. By withdrawing from the society, you will prevent pert, raw preachers from teasing you in their society."<sup>29</sup> Years later, in a letter to John Thornton, Berridge gives this description of the Methodists of his day, "Much preaching and hearing is among the Methodists, and plenty of ordinances is a great blessing, but if they do not bring us much upon our knees, they suckle the head without nourishing the heart."<sup>30</sup>

How do these changes relate to Berridge's perceptions of the Cambridgeshire Revival? It could be argued that Berridge's newly-adopted Calvinist theology led him to downplay the events of 1759. Perhaps Berridge, recognizing the depth of his sin and the tenacious hold that pride had in his heart, began to view his role in the revival differently. Rather than seeing himself as the central figure of the Cambridgeshire Revival, Berridge perhaps began to interpret the events through the lens of God's sovereignty and grace. And it may be argued that the long-lasting effects of the work of God in Everton over the next thirty-four years lay more with Berridge's willingness to

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<sup>29</sup> John Berridge, quoted in Robert Williams Dale and James Guinness Rogers, eds., *The Congregational Magazine New Series Vol. IX* (London: Jackson and Walford, 1845), 272.

<sup>30</sup> "Letter to John Thornton, October 1, 1784" in Berridge, *Works*, 413.



humbly submit himself to God's sovereign work than by perceiving himself as the prime agent in the occasion of revival.

Sixth, the *Cambridgeshire Revival* had a lasting impact upon Everton and the surrounding area. The impact of Berridge and the revival on the English Midlands was felt not only during Berridge's lifetime but even after his death. In 1794, one year after Berridge's death, John Newton wrote to his friend, William Wilberforce and made reference to a small village twelve kilometres from Cambridge near Royston. In the letter, Newton notes the spiritual state of the entire region. He writes:

The good effects of Mr. Berridge's labours in this neighbourhood are very visible. It is true, though most of those who were his people are now dissenters, but they become so, through necessity, because there was no minister in the Establishment, near them, who preached the Gospel, or who showed any care for their souls... He was zealous and faithful. His church was crowded, and many others of course were greatly thinned.<sup>31</sup>

Writing in 1838, nearly a half century after Berridge's death, Robert Philip, author of Whitefield's biography describes the impact that the Vicar of Everton had upon the area. He writes, "One thing I do know; - that the memory of Berridge is fragrant throughout and around Cambridgeshire."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> "Letter to William Wilberforce, June 19, 1794" in John Newton (*Unpublished letter of notes of Marilyn Rouse*). It is possible that this village was the Ashwell on the border of Hertfordshire on the edge of the county of Cambridge. In 1842, the editor of the *Congregational Magazine* was given the task of evaluating the strength of the churches in both urban and rural areas. The editor notes, "In the village of Ashwell...the venerable John Berridge, the vicar of Everton, used occasionally to preach at the Westbury Farm about seventy years ago. An aged gentleman, yet living, tells with a beaming countenance of the visits of that devoted minister of Christ, to the Farm House which was his father's home, and how the people flocked to hear him, and with eager attention and streaming eyes listened to the truths which fell from his venerable lips. The *Congregational Magazine* Vol. VI (London: Jackson and Walford, 1842), 36-37.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Philip, *The Life and Times of the Reverend George Whitefield* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1838), 437.

## CHAPTER 7

### BERRIDGE AND THE ROLE OF ITINERANT PREACHING

On a human level, the Cambridgeshire Revival spread as rapidly as it did because of two important decisions that John Berridge made. First, Berridge decided not to restrict himself to his local pulpit, but to take up the task of itinerant preaching. Second, Berridge also devoted time and energy towards identifying, equipping and releasing lay itinerant preachers to carry out the work of the gospel in the surrounding area.

John Wesley was particularly influential in encouraging Berridge to take up itinerant preaching. For Wesley, the calling of the Christian was clear, “Church or no Church, we must attend to the work of saving souls.”<sup>1</sup> Berridge agreed. To him, the urgent call was to preach wherever truth was not being preached. If that meant preaching in a neighbouring parish, then he did not shrink from the challenges associated with doing so.

Berridge’s decision to itinerate was also influenced by his ecclesiology. Although a committed Anglican, Berridge’s evangelical consciousness was not church-bound let alone tied to the ecclesiology of the Church of England. He writes, “By birth and education I am both a churchman and a dissenter – I love both, and could be either, and wish real Gospel ministers of every denomination could embrace one another.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Smyth, *Simeon and Church Order* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 256.

<sup>2</sup> “Letter to Benjamin Mills, November 17, 1784” in John Berridge, *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Berridge, A.M., with a Memoir of his life by the Rev. Richard Whittingham* (London: Paternoster Row, 1864), 275.

To Berridge, admission into the True Church was not through baptism as the Catechism taught, but rather through belief and conversion. "I do not much prize our Church Catechism;" Berridge wrote in a letter to John Thornton "it begins so very ill, calling baptism our new birth, and making us thereby members of Christ, children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven." This teaching, Berridge concludes, "may suit a covenant of works, but not a covenant of grace."<sup>3</sup> Berridge's low view of ecclesiology is perhaps best expressed in a letter he wrote to Lady Huntingdon in 1777. "I regard neither high church, nor low church, nor any church, but the church of Christ, which is not built with hands, nor circumscribed within particular walls, nor confined to a singular denomination."<sup>4</sup>

To Berridge, what mattered most was that people would hear the true gospel and upon hearing truth would then enter into a lively experience of faith. The problem, as Berridge perceived it, lay in the dearth of evangelical preachers in and around the Everton parish and therefore little opportunity for people to hear the true gospel within their respective parishes. One year before revival broke out, Berridge did note that the situation was slowly beginning to change. He notes that there were an increasing number of clergy in the region being awakened to the true gospel. Twenty years ago God had raised such figures as George Whitefield and John Wesley and now it seemed to Berridge that God was on the verge of doing something significant in his own church in Everton.

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<sup>3</sup> "Letter to John Thornton, October 27, 1787" in Berridge, *Works*, 425.

<sup>4</sup> "Letter to Lady Huntingdon, April 26, 1777" in Berridge, *Works*, 515.

Berridge's decision to itinerate was not, however, without its challenges. In fact, it nearly cost him his position as vicar. In an interview with a J. Sutcliffe of Olney, Berridge recounted how his choice to itinerate landed him into immediate difficulty with his local Bishop. Berridge told Sutcliffe that soon after he began to itinerate, he was complained of by someone from a neighbouring parish and as a result, had to appear before the Bishop of his Diocese. Upon his arrival, the Bishop asked Berridge, "Well, Berridge, they tell me you go about preaching out of your own parish. Did I institute you to the livings of A---y, or E----n, or P----n?" Berridge replied that he had not nor did he lay claim over these parishes. To which the Bishop responded, "Well, but you go and preach there, which you have no right to do!" Berridge, having admitted that he had indeed preached parochially, recounted how the Bishop then said, "I tell you, you have no right to preach out of your own parish; and, if you do not desist from it, you will very likely be sent to Huntingdon gaol." Berridge then replied, "As to that, my lord, I have no greater liking to Huntingdon gaol than other people; but I had rather go thither with a good conscience, than live at my liberty without one." Switching tact, the Bishop began to entreat, "Berridge, you know I have been your friend, and I wish to be so still. I am continually teased with the complaints of the clergymen around you. Only assure me that you will keep to your own parish; you may do as you please there. I have but little time to live; do not bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave...will you promise me that you will preach no more out of your parish?" Berridge answered, "It would afford me great pleasure to comply with your lordship's request, if I could do it with a good conscience. I am satisfied the Lord has blessed my labours of this kind, and I dare

not desist.” “A good conscience!” said the Bishop. “Do you not know that it is contrary to the Canons of the Church?” In response Berridge boldly stated, “There is one Canon, my lord, which saith, *Go preach the gospel to every creature.*”<sup>5</sup>

As this anecdote illustrates, the rationale for the itinerant preacher was clear to Berridge. So long as there was a lack of evangelical preachers in the area, Berridge believed that it was his responsibility to make up for that lack. To make matters worse – for the Bishop at least - Berridge also convinced other pastors of this pressing need to itinerate. Early in Charles Simeon’s career, Berridge wrote to him and explained the importance of itinerant preaching. He argued that “if every Parish Church were blessed with a Gospel Minister, there would be little need of Itinerant Preaching.” However, because such preachers “are thinly scattered about the Country...it behoves them to take advantage of fields, or barns, or houses, to cast abroad the Gospel Seed.”<sup>6</sup>

The life that Berridge was calling the itinerant preacher into was not an easy one. Berridge knew the difficulties firsthand. And it was of this hardship that he often warned young pastors about as they considered taking up a similar practice. Berridge once wrote to a Rev. D. Simpson of Cheshire on the subject of parochial preaching. In the letter, Berridge describes his own experience, “When I began to itinerate, a multitude of

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<sup>5</sup> “An Interview with the late Mr. Berridge, related by J. Sutcliffe, Olney” in Berridge, *Works*, xlviii-l. Berridge continues to describe how his career was saved through what he saw as a Providential intervention. A fellow from Cambridge who was converted through Berridge’s preaching intervened on the vicar’s behalf to Thomas Pitt, nephew of William Pitt, then Secretary of State. He wrote, “Our old friend Berridge has a living in Bedfordshire, and, I am informed, he has a squire in his parish, that gives him a deal of trouble, has accused him to the bishop of the diocese, and it is said, will turn him out of his living. I wish you could contrive to put a stop to these proceedings.” Thomas Pitt, also a fellow of Clare Hall, then spoke to the nobleman in charge of the Bishop’s promotion. Not surprisingly, Berridge’s position as vicar of Everton remained quite secure from this point on.

<sup>6</sup> “Letter to Charles Simeon, 1785” in Smyth, *Church Order*, 276.

dangers surrounded me, and seemed ready to engulf me. My relations and friends were up in arms; my college was provoked; my bishop incensed; the clergy on fire; and the church canons pointing their ghastly mouths at me.” If Simpson were to proceed and choose to itinerate, Berridge warned, “[W]herever you go, a storm will follow you, which may fright you, but will do no real harm. Make the Lord your whole trust, and all will be well.”<sup>7</sup>

From his first experience in May, 1759, Berridge continued to itinerate throughout the neighbouring parishes.<sup>8</sup> In 1774, Berridge wrote to John Thornton that he had been able to itinerate for thirteen weeks that summer. He describes his experience, “In most places I find very large auditories. My cathedral barns are much crowded, and the cathedral yards well sprinkled with hearers. No outrage or mocking as usual but silence and attention.”<sup>9</sup> In a letter to Lady Huntingdon, Berridge observes that the calling God had given him was to not only pastor within his parish, but also to serve as a “riding pedlar to serve near forty shops in the country, besides my own parish...”<sup>10</sup>

To Berridge, one of the keys to revival and spiritual renewal in the area was the raising up of lay itinerant preachers. Though the obvious recruiting center should have been Cambridge and indeed many serious students were coming out of University, Berridge nevertheless found these candidates unsuitable to meet the demands required

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<sup>7</sup> “Letter to the Rev. D. Simpson, August 8, 1775” in Berridge, *Works*, 529-530.

<sup>8</sup> Berridge continued to preach Sundays in Everton, but often itinerated throughout the week. It is interesting to note that Berridge refused to preach far beyond the English Midlands. Other than his regular visits to Lady Huntingdon’s chapels in London, Berridge kept largely to the surrounding region.

<sup>9</sup> “Letter to John Thornton, August 10, 1774” in Berridge, *Works*, 384.

<sup>10</sup> “Cheerful Piety” in Berridge, *Works*, 356.

of a rural itinerant preacher. In a letter to Lady Huntingdon, Berridge outlines the harsh conditions that such preachers might endure:

I fear my weekly circuits would not suit a London or a Bath divine, nor any tender evangelist that is environed with prunello. Long rides and miry roads in sharp weather! Cold houses to sit in, with very moderate fuel, and three or four children roaring or rocking about you! Coarse food and meagre liquor; lumpy beds to lie on, and too short for the feet; stiff blankets, like boards, for a covering; and live cattle in plenty to feed upon you! Rise at five in the morning to preach; at seven, breakfast on tea that smells very sickly; at eight, mount a horse with boots never cleaned; and then ride home, praising God for all mercies!<sup>11</sup>

Rather than looking to the university for preachers, Berridge recruited lay preachers from within his own parish – men who understood the language and the culture of the local people. Because most of the laymen were quite poor, Berridge spent much of his own earnings clothing and equipping them. In January, 1766, William Romaine wrote, “Yesterday I dined with Mr. Berridge. He was making great complaints of his debts, contracted by his keeping out of his own living, two preachers and their horses, and several local preachers, and for the rent of several barns, in which they preach.”<sup>12</sup> In a letter to John Thornton, Berridge notes that to outfit two full-time lay preachers, he would give each of them £25 per year for horses, clothes and to pay for turnpike expenses. He then writes, “Near forty towns have been evangelized, many of which lay at a great distance from each other, and two lay preachers ride from town to town, preaching morning and evening every day....There are also six Sunday preachers, who often want support, and receive it from me. By this means the Gospel is preached without charge to the hearers. No collections are made, which mightily stoppeth the

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<sup>11</sup> “Letter to Lady Huntingdon, December 26, 1767” in Berridge, *Works*, 503.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in L.E. Elliott-Binns, *The Early Evangelicals: A Religious and Social Study* (Greenwich, UK: The Seabury Press, 1953), 277.

world's clamour." Outfitting lay pastors for ministry was costly for Berridge, but in the end, worth the sacrifice. "I scatter my mites about, because I am trading for another world. What silver and copper is left behind me, will profit me nothing; but what is given for Christ's sake will find a gracious recompense."<sup>13</sup> Despite their poverty and (as often was the case) illiteracy, the combination of these lay preachers supported by Berridge (and, indirectly, John Thornton) and Berridge's willingness to himself tirelessly itinerate, the gospel was effectively communicated to the poor rural folk in and around Everton.

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<sup>13</sup> "Letter to John Thornton, May 3, 1773" in Smyth, *Church Order*, 268.



## CHAPTER 8

### PASTORAL LIFE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE REVIVAL

John Berridge served as Vicar in Everton for 37 years. The first five years of his tenure were rather tumultuous to say the least. During this time Berridge unexpectedly experienced his own conversion, witnessed the spiritual transformation of those in his church, and participated in the extraordinary events of the Cambridgeshire Revival. As the revival subsided, life began to settle down for Berridge and he turned his attention to the work that pastoring a rural church required.

Though most of his attention would be directed to his parish in Everton, Berridge's friendship with George Whitefield opened regular opportunities to preach in other venues. Berridge first grew acquainted with the "grand itinerant" in the late 1750s when Whitefield paid Everton a number of visits. Impressed by what he saw, Whitefield wrote in 1758, "Mr Berridge who was lately awakened at Everton promises to be a burning and shining light."<sup>1</sup> In early 1761, exhausted and weakened through ill health and constant itineration, Whitefield looked to his new friend Berridge to assist him in carrying out his preaching duties at his church in London. A great preacher himself, Whitefield was impressed with the oratory skills of his new friend. Of Berridge's preaching, he remarked, "A new instrument is raised up out of Cambridge University. He has been here preaching with great flame, and like an angel of the churches indeed."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nigel R. Pibworth, *Gospel Pedlar: The Story of John Berridge and the Eighteenth-Century Revival* (Welwyn, Hertfordshire: Evangelical Press, 1987), 41.

<sup>2</sup> George Whitefield, *Memoirs of the Life of the Rev. George Whitefield compiled by the Rev. John Gillies* (London: 1772), 235.

The next winter Berridge again returned to London to assist Whitefield in preaching. To Berridge, the thought of ministering regularly in London was more attractive than that of itinerating during the winter. Since most journeys were still done by horse or foot over treacherous roads, harsh winters presented serious challenges to any traveller of the time. Therefore, for the next thirty years Berridge spent part of the winter in London preaching between January and Easter at Whitefield's Tabernacle and Tottenham Court Road Chapel. That Berridge was able to shift his oratory style from which suited his rural, largely illiterate congregation in Everton to that which reached an educated and sophisticated audience in London is indeed remarkable and bears testimony to the preaching gifts that Whitefield recognized in Berridge.

Though committed to preach in London every winter, Berridge never forsook his primary responsibility to his Everton parish. On more than one occasion, Lady Huntingdon tried her best to tempt Berridge to turn his attention away from Everton and preach in her pulpits on a more permanent basis. For example, three years after the revival Lady Huntingdon wrote to Berridge strongly encouraging him to accept a "call" to preach in Brighthelmstone. Berridge's response is both playful and forthright. "My Lady," he writes, "I cannot see my call to Brighthelmstone; and I ought to see it for myself, not another for me....You threaten me, Madam, like a Pope, not like a mother in Israel, when you declare roundly, that God will scourge me if I do not come..."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Letter to Lady Huntingdon, November 16, 1762" in John Berridge, *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Berridge, A.M., with a Memoir of his life by the Rev. Richard Whittingham* (London: Paternoster Row, 1864), 445.

In 1767, sensing the need to remain closer to home, Berridge again refused repeated requests by Lady Huntingdon to preach at her new chapel in Bath. With customary cheek, he writes, “Verily you are a good piper; but I know not how to dance. I love your scorpion letters dearly, though they rake the flesh off my bones; and I believe your eyes are better than my own, but I cannot yet read with your glasses.”<sup>4</sup> In the end, despite her best efforts to lure Berridge to her chapels, Berridge chose to remain committed to his congregation. Such a willingness to remain in the relative obscurity of rural Everton over the more high-profile pastoral positions in London is indeed noteworthy and is indicative of a rare pastoral quality Berridge possessed – the quality to remain faithful to the people to whom one is called to minister.

### ***Daily Ministry Life***

What was ministry life like in Everton? One of our best windows into the day-to-day challenges of rural ministry life is found in an undated letter Berridge writes to a Rev. Walter Shirley. In it, Berridge laid out directions for Shirley as he took on the task of filling Berridge’s pulpit whilst he was away in London. Berridge’s description of the ordinary rhythms of the day offers the reader a vivid picture of what pastoral life in his rural parish looked like.

With regards to “Family” affairs, that is, the affairs of the church, Berridge writes:

Prayers at nine in the morning, and nine in the evening: first reading a chapter, and singing a hymn, the hymns always sung standing. On Saturday evenings the serious people of the parish come to my house about seven. I first sing a hymn,

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<sup>4</sup> “Letter to Lady Huntingdon, December 26, 1767” in Berridge, *Works*, 452.

then expound a chapter, then sing another hymn, then pray, and conclude with singing on my knees, 'Praise God from whom,' etc.

As for what Rev. Shirley could expect in terms of food and provision, Berridge warned the pastor not to expect too much:

You must eat what is set before you, and be thankful. I get hot victuals but once a week for myself, viz., on Saturday: but because you are an honourable man I have ordered two hot joints to be got each week for you, with a pudding each day at noon, some pies and a cold ham; so that you will fare bravely; much better than your Master with barley bread and dry fish. There is also ale, port, mountain, and a little Madeira to drink: the liquor suits a coronet. Use what I have just as your own. I make no feasts, but save all I can to give all I can. I have never yet been worth a groat at the year's end, nor desire it.

With his customary wit, Berridge also encouraged his colleague to preach the same type of "food" as he would be eating - food that was both simple and plain. Again he writes:

I hope you will like your expedition: the people are simple-hearted. They want bread and not venison; and can eat their meat without sauce or a French cook. The week-day preachings are in the evening at half-an-hour past six. If you can preach in a house, the method with us is, first to sing a hymn, then pray, then preach, then sing another hymn, then pray again, then conclude with 'Praise God from whom,' etc. The Lord bless you, and make your journey prosperous!<sup>5</sup>

Pastoral life in a rural church was neither a comfortable affair nor an easy one.

Berridge knew too well that the chief challenge that any visiting preacher would face was that of contextualizing their sermons in a manner that could be understandable.

Preachers used to speaking before educated and refined congregations would no doubt find it challenging to preach "bread" rather than "venison".

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<sup>5</sup> "Letter to Rev. Walter Shirley (undated)" in Berridge, *Works*, 533-534.

To reach the poor, illiterate auditors that made up the Everton parish required a deep understanding of their hearts and years of rural ministry gave Berridge this understanding and appreciation of his parishioners. He understood, as good preachers do, the language of his people and their spiritual needs. As a result, Berridge preached in a plain style, using simple language with a “certain rustic homeliness” in order to communicate the message of the Gospel.<sup>6</sup> Church historian G.R. Balleine, writing a century later, remarked that Berridge’s sermons in themselves were nothing noteworthy, but when preached, he “interpolated so many quaint asides, homely illustrations, racy anecdotes, personal applications, and so many pithy proverbial sayings that the rustic loves, that he became a veritable Mrs. Poyser in the pulpit. The Church of England has had few clergy who could so perfectly get in touch with the plough-boy intellect.”<sup>7</sup>

After his conversion, the church in Everton thrived and remained relatively healthy for the duration of Berridge’s ministry. However, there were periods of dryness and stagnation. One of those periods was during the early 1780s. In 1780, Berridge prayed for spiritual renewal in his congregation. He writes that “Our skins are growing dry; the spiritual pulse beats very low; and grey hairs are sprinkled upon us.”<sup>8</sup> Two years later, the situation had not changed noticeably thus causing Berridge to complain,

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Smyth, *Simeon and Church Order* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 182.

<sup>7</sup> G.R. Balleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908), 99.

<sup>8</sup> “Letter to John Newton, December 12, 1780” in Berridge, *Works*, 402.

“Church work goes on heavily here: many of the old sheep are called home and few lambs drop into the fold.”<sup>9</sup>

One possible explanation (or perhaps an exacerbation) for this period of stagnation may be the generally poor quality of the preachers who filled Berridge’s pulpit when he was absent. In a letter dated September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1782, Berridge decries the damaging effects his preaching substitute had upon his church whilst he was away in London. He writes:

My church at present is in a decline, and seems consumptive. Mr. Hicks supplied my church from September last till the following Easter; and fairly drove away half my congregation. My present curate is a stop-gap, but no assistant. He cannot preach without notes, nor read handsomely with notes; so my hearers are dwindling away, and transporting from Everton Church to Gamgay Meeting...”<sup>10</sup>

To his relief, the situation began to slowly improve and by 1785 the church was growing again. Berridge writes, “My church is usually very full in afternoons, and the people are awake and attentive, but the congregation is almost a new one. Many old sheep are housed in the upper fold; and many, who live at a distance, are dropped into neighbouring meetings, and only pay occasional visits to Everton.”<sup>11</sup>

What precipitated the change? At least some of the credit for the new growth that was being experienced must be attributed to the arrival of Berridge’s new curate who, unlike the string of incompetent ones that preceded him, proved to be capable, loyal, and a great help to Berridge in carrying out his ministry duties. In October, 1782,

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<sup>9</sup> “Letter to John Newton, September 17, 1782” in Berridge, *Works*, 408.

<sup>10</sup> “Letter to John Thornton, September 24, 1782” in Berridge, *Works*, 273.

<sup>11</sup> “Letter to John Thornton, July 13, 1785” in Berridge, *Works*, 416.

Richard Whittingham joined Berridge in Everton and served faithfully and effectively as his curate until 1789.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> He later returned as curate in 1790 to help the aging Berridge.

## CHAPTER 9

### WRITINGS

John Berridge did not enjoy writing. Unusually (and frustrating for historians of the Evangelical movement), he did not keep the letters he did receive. When he did correspond, Berridge often found himself prefacing his letters with an apology for his epistolary tardiness. In a letter written to John Newton in 1782, Berridge expressed his reluctance to even read his friend's letter "for fear of the date, so disdainful it looked for want of an answer." Admitting his weakness, Berridge continued, "During my latter years I have been continually making apologies for slack returns to my corresponding friends, and am not one jot better yet."<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to the abundance of published works, letters, and journals associated with such contemporaries as John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, and John Newton, the majority of Berridge's collected writings is contained in a single volume.<sup>2</sup> In the years following his death in 1793, more letters came to light and were published in various and sundry journals. In 1882, a book was published on Berridge's marginal notes in sermon preparation.<sup>3</sup> Also published separately were Berridge's sermon outlines which though thoughtful, do not come close to capturing the flavour of Berridge's preaching, for they contain none of the homey illustrations, rural idioms, and humorous

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<sup>1</sup> "Letter to John Newton, September 17, 1782" in John Berridge, *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Berridge, A.M., with a Memoir of his life by the Rev. Richard Whittingham* (London: Paternoster Row, 1864), 407.

<sup>2</sup> Nigel Pipworth noted that it was left to Berridge's curate, Richard Whittingham to hunt around and collect what he could in terms of letters and anecdotes thus delaying the publication of Berridge's *Memoir and Works*. Nigel Pibworth, *The Gospel Pedlar: The Story of John Berridge and the Eighteenth-Century Revival* (Welwyn, Hertfordshire: Evangelical Press, 1987), 7.

<sup>3</sup> John Berridge, *Gospel Gems* (London: William Wileman, 1882).



anecdotes that made his sermons so colourful to his hearers. In total, these works, combined with his farewell sermon and an early tract, constitute Berridge's complete published works.

This apparent lack of production did not stem, however, from a lack of scholarly acumen on Berridge's part. At Cambridge, Berridge was considered an intellectual of considerable aptitude. In Dyer's *History of Cambridge*, Berridge is referred to as "a good scholar".<sup>4</sup> Sir Marcus Loane described Berridge's time in Cambridge in the following manner, "It was said that all through the years from 1734 to 1756 he gave fifteen hours a day to study, and he read so hard in these years that he mastered the whole world of literature."<sup>5</sup>

After his conversion, though, Berridge experienced a growing tension between his natural love for learning and a growing suspicion towards the learning of "the world". On one hand, Berridge valued the work of the mind. At Everton, he maintained a personal library, regularly exchanged ideas through letters, often offering critiques of the written works of his friends, and stressed the overall importance of learning. In a letter to Mrs. Riland, Henry Venn once wrote, "[A]s Mr. Berridge (an excellent scholar himself) says, 'Learning is a good stone to throw at a dog, to stop his barking.'"<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, Berridge knew from his own experience at Cambridge the perils of worldly learning and how it could turn one's attention away from God and the Bible. In his *Christian World Unmasked*, Berridge writes, "[W]hen human science is

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<sup>4</sup> Cited in Berridge, *Works*, xliii.

<sup>5</sup> Sir Marcus Loane, *Cambridge and the Evangelical Succession* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2007), 52.

<sup>6</sup> "Letter to Mrs. Riland, February 7, 1776" in Henry Venn, *The Letters of Henry Venn* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1993), 229.

cultivated eagerly in a Christian country, the study of the Bible always grows neglected.”<sup>7</sup> To Berridge, trusting in any source other than the Bible led to pride. In a letter of vocational counsel, Berridge wrote to Samuel Wilks warning the young man not to trust too much in his own abilities. Skill may win one respect, but it would lead to hubris. It is much better to remember, Berridge maintained “that one grain of godly fear is of more worth than a hundred thousand heads-full of attic wit, or full of philosophic, theologic, or commercial science.”<sup>8</sup>

Outside of his letters, outlines and minor tracts, Berridge’s writings can be divided into four main works (two of which are comprised of letters). These writings are: *Justification by Faith Alone* (1762) *The Christian World Unmasked: Pray Come and Peep* (1773), *Sion’s Songs or Hymns* (1785), and *Cheerful Piety: or Religion without gloom: exemplified in selected letters on the most important truths of Christianity* (1792).

Although none of the four main published works offers any original theological insight, what they do offer the reader is a window into Berridge’s heart. Standing at the center of his thinking and his writings is the consistent theme of the doctrine of grace. Berridge’s own experience of God’s grace – his conversion, its meaning, and the desire to personally cultivate “experimental faith” - permeated everything that he wrote.

#### ***Justification by Faith Alone (1762)***

This work is comprised of a single letter Berridge had written in 1758 to a clergyman in Nottinghamshire. The letter had apparently then been circulated without

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<sup>7</sup> John Berridge, *The Christian World Unmasked: Pray Come and Peep* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1854), 57.

<sup>8</sup> “Letter to Samuel Wilks, Esq., August 16, 1774” in Berridge, *Works*, 387.

Berridge's knowledge or permission. Having learned of it, Berridge decided to publish the letter in 1762 under the title of *Justification by Faith Alone*. The content of the letter is highly autobiographical and through it, Berridge offers an account of his own conversion experience and the impact that his conversion had upon his life and ministry at Everton.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout the letter, Berridge constantly contrasted his previous views of salvation and sanctification – which were tantamount to self-effort and a mixture of faith and works – with the transformational impact that justification by faith had upon his life. Berridge writes, “When we are justified, it is done freely, i.e. graciously, without any the least merits of ours, and solely by the grace of God, through Jesus Christ.”<sup>10</sup> Towards the end of the letter, Berridge wrote encouragingly of the impact that this doctrine was having in the surrounding region with “forty clergymen” coming to a similar understanding as Berridge had in faith. He then concluded the letter grateful for “the mercy of God in opening mine eyes and leading me to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus” and hoping that the recipient of the letter would be instrumental in “bringing souls from darkness into light.”<sup>11</sup>

### ***The Christian World Unmasked (1773)***

This work is considered Berridge's most significant scholarly contribution and was published in the middle of the Calvinist Controversy.<sup>12</sup> Though the work played a significant role in the controversy itself, its style left much to be desired. Both in its time

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<sup>9</sup> For a detailed description of Berridge's conversion, see Chapter 4.

<sup>10</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone” in Berridge, *Works*, 347.

<sup>11</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone” in Berridge, *Works*, 357.

<sup>12</sup> It was published in 1773, went through two editions and then one more in 1774. For Berridge's role in the Calvinist Controversy, see Chapter 10.

and in retrospect, *Christian World Unmasked* was widely considered unrefined and unsystematic.<sup>13</sup> As for content, no new ground was covered theologically in the age-old Calvinist-Arminian debate.

So why did Berridge publish this work? The main reason was that Berridge believed that too much was at stake in the Calvinist Controversy to remain silent. To Berridge, the controversy was not simply over theological hair-splitting, but what lay in jeopardy was the very core of the Gospel message itself. What was being introduced through the works of John and Charles Wesley and John Fletcher was a Gospel message that had as its foundation not justification by faith alone, but rather justification by a mixture of faith and works. Given Berridge own conversion journey out of righteous self-effort towards trusting in the sole merits of Christ and the Cross for salvation, the issues being raised were not simply academic, but mattered deeply to the vicar. It is for this primary reason that Berridge waded into the waters of controversy with this publication.

In doing so, what Berridge ended up producing can hardly be considered a masterpiece of prose. The style of *Christian World Unmasked* is often both unconventional and disjointed. Written as an informal dialogue between two characters concerning the way of salvation, Berridge introduces a physician who enters into a dialogue with a patient who does not realize that he is (spiritually) sick. "Lend me a chair, and I will sit down and talk a little with you...I am come to inquire of your health,

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<sup>13</sup> Bishop Ryle was less than impressed with this particular contribution of Berridge, writing that the work "contains much that is pointed and clear; but it is written throughout in such a very unrefined style that it is not likely to be extensively useful." J.C. Ryle, *The Christian Leaders of the Last Century* (Moscow: Charles Nolan Publishers, 2002), 217.

and would ask a few questions about it.” “[M]y business does not lie with the walls of your house, but with the tenant within. I bring no advice to strengthen your clay, but wish to see your spirit healed, and to set the heavenly lamp a burning.”<sup>14</sup>

Throughout the work, Berridge engages in a “conversation” over the foundations for achieving spiritual health. As the work progresses, Berridge the physician sets to critiquing the patient’s self-efforts towards spiritual health, and specifically critiques the place that “sincere obedience” plays in securing one’s salvation. Such a “gospel” had fundamental flaws for, it misunderstood the fall of humanity, undervalued the centrality of the Cross, and underestimated the dire state in which humanity finds itself apart from the completed work of Christ.

Through the informal dialogue between the two imaginary characters, the *Christian World Unmasked* offers the reader a re-introduction to the tenets of moderate Calvinism specifically, humanity’s inability to save itself apart from God’s grace, the election of those whom God would save, the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the believer through faith, and the perseverance of the saints. To Berridge, these tenets were incontrovertible and foundational to the Gospel message and ultimately constituted the “capital doctrine of the Gospel, a most precious grace of the new covenant and the everlasting glory of the Redeemer.”<sup>15</sup>

Despite its awkward style and content, what does distinguish *Christian World Unmasked* from many of the other tracts being circulated during the Calvinist

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<sup>14</sup> Berridge, *Christian World Unmasked*, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Berridge, *Christian World Unmasked*, 138.

Controversy is its pragmatic and pastoral tone.<sup>16</sup> Recognizing the unpopularity of such Calvinist doctrines as election, imputed righteousness and perseverance of the saints, Berridge insisted that these doctrines were unpopular because they had been distorted and not clearly understood. For example, rather than leading to antinomianism (as Wesley and Fletcher insisted), the doctrine of perseverance should encourage the believer to grow in faith knowing that he is intimately connected as a sheep to his Shepherd and that his “walk is heavenward.”<sup>17</sup>

Drawing from his own experience and the lessons learned through his long sickness, Berridge suspected that the reason why these foundational doctrines were so often rejected had less to do with intellectual objections, but rather with issues of the heart. What these doctrines did, in Berridge’s opinion, was “batter human pride, undermine all human merit, lay the human worm in the dust, and give the glory of salvation wholly unto God.”<sup>18</sup>

### ***Sion’s Songs or Hymns (1785)***

In the first half of the eighteenth-century, the singing of hymns was popular among Methodists and Dissenters but had not been embraced in the Established Church.<sup>19</sup> For Berridge’s part, he encouraged hymn singing in his church early in his ministry. In fact, Berridge published a book of hymns in 1760 entitled *A Collection of*

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<sup>16</sup> It is perhaps for this reason that Berridge’s work could not stand up against the intellectual prowess of John Fletcher and his scathing critique of *Christian World Unmasked*. See Chapter 10.

<sup>17</sup> Berridge, *Christian World Unmasked*, 158.

<sup>18</sup> Berridge, *Christian World Unmasked*, 165.

<sup>19</sup> For the role of hymnody in the eighteenth-century, see Madeleine Marshall and Janet Todd, *English Congregational Hymns in the Eighteenth-Century* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1982) and Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 257-289.

*Divine Songs*. The collection drew from many sources including many which were penned by John and Charles Wesley.<sup>20</sup> As Berridge shifted theologically away from Wesley's Arminianism towards moderate Calvinism, he also distanced himself from this early collection of hymns and took to writing new ones. These new hymns were written as a diversion during his long period of sickness in the early 1770s with the majority of them written during a six month period in 1773.

Though largely forgotten today, Berridge's hymns were rather popular in the eighteenth-century. His *Sion Songs or Hymns* (1785) sold well and went through six editions and reprints before an 1842 edition came out through J.C. Philpot.

Though popular, few nineteenth-century historians saw much of value in them. Even Bishop J.C. Ryle did not think highly of Berridge's hymns writing, "The hymns I shall leave alone. The Vicar of Everton was no more a poet than Cicero or Julius Caesar; and although the doctrine of his hymns is very sound, the poetry of them is very poor, while the ideas they occasionally present are painfully ludicrous."<sup>21</sup> Philpot was slightly more generous, writing, "Berridge has few poetic ornaments. His rhymes are often false, his metre limping, his language slovenly and grammatical, and his expressions rude and coarse. But there is a heavenly unction which buries all defects..."<sup>22</sup>

When assessing the merits (or lack thereof) of *Sion's Songs or Hymns*, it is important to keep in mind the intended audience of the hymns. Like the Olney Hymns (1779) of his good friend John Newton, Berridge's hymns were highly experiential

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<sup>20</sup> Much to the chagrin of both Wesley brothers, Berridge revised Charles Wesley's hymns in order to make them more suitable to the tastes of his rural congregation. See Chapter 10.

<sup>21</sup> Ryle, *Christian Leaders*, 217.

<sup>22</sup> Cited in Pipworth, *Gospel Pedlar*, 238.

drawing from his own conversion experience and the central place that the doctrine of grace had in his life. Alongside the preached sermon, these hymns were mainly introduced to the congregation to complement the message and offer a mnemonic means to remember and apply what was preached and thus promote spiritual growth.

Considering that the hearers in Berridge's church were largely from rural areas, illiterate, and uneducated, it should not be surprising that a less than refined style was adopted by Berridge to reach the hearts of the hearers – an aim always on the forefront of Berridge's mind. Therefore, one finds throughout his hymns an abundance of allusions and references to rural life. This is the case in Hymn 63 where Berridge adopts the persona of a bird restlessly flying hither and thither over the open fields before finally coming to rest in Christ.

I was a rover too,  
And roving found no rest;  
But now at length the way I view,  
And here I build my nest.

Of Christ I chirp and sing,  
And when he casts an eye,  
I flutter up with brisker wing,  
And warble in the sky.

Such is my pleasant task,  
To sing of this sweet road;  
And if the cause a stranger ask,  
It is my way to God.<sup>23</sup>

Again, Hymn 123 presented the hearer with an especially earthy look at spiritual growth. Throughout the hymn, Berridge drew from many of the day-to-day images with

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<sup>23</sup> "Hymn 63" in Berridge, *Works*, 224.



which the farmers in his congregation would be familiar in order to teach the meaning of Proverbs 28:19, "He that tilleth his land, shall have plenty of bread."

Dung the ground with many prayers,  
Mellow it with gracious tears,  
Drench it too with Jesus' blood  
Then the ground is sweet and good.

Watch the swine, a filthy train,  
Swinish lusts will eat the grain;  
Hoe up all the ragged thorn,  
Worldly cares will choke the corn.

Muse upon the gospel word,  
Seek direction from the Lord,  
Trust the Lord to give it thee  
And a blessing thou shalt see.

He will cram the barn with store,  
Make the wine-press trickle o'er,  
Bless thee now, and bless thee still,  
Thou shalt eat, and have thy fill.<sup>24</sup>

Employing such simple and direct imagery, Berridge seemed to sacrifice style and refinement in order to teach his congregation the "experimental" faith he had come to learn himself using words and images that his congregation would understand. Through these hymns, Berridge encouraged his people to repent, to reflect, to remember, and to depend on the merits of Christ's atoning sacrifice for salvation and spiritual growth. Theological themes of *justification by faith, election, perseverance of the saints, abiding in Christ* and *the pilgrim life* run through Berridge's hymns, but are expressed in personal, practical, and memorable terms. In fact, most of these themes are found in

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<sup>24</sup> "Hymn 123" in Berridge, *Works*, 244.

varying degrees in Hymn 83, a Communion Hymn reflecting on the text in Ezekiel 34:29,

"I will raise up for them a plant of renown."

Thy glory, Jesus, fills the skies,  
Plant of renown thou art,  
A tree desir'd to make one wise,  
And cheer a drooping heart!

Thou bearest ripe and goodly fruit,  
Fresh blooming all the year,  
Which every famish'd soul will suit,  
And withering health repair.

...

No tree like this among the wood!  
It grows on Calvary,  
And water'd well with Jesus' blood,  
Bears choicest fruit for me.

The fruit is righteousness divine,  
To cleanse and clothe my soul;  
And all, who on the fruit can dine,  
Are made completely whole.

...

Too long, O Lord, my soul had fed  
On graces, duties, frames,  
Yet these are not my heavenly bread,  
Though lovely things and names.

Thou art my gospel bread and food,  
Thou art my joyous feast;  
To eat thy flesh, and drink thy blood,  
Is gospel health and rest.

Thy life and death are my repast,  
The precious fruit of grace;  
And when this dainty food I taste,  
I live, and love, and bless.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> "Hymn 83" in Berridge, *Works*, 230.

In the end, Berridge left his readers a collection of hymns whose quality cannot stand in comparison to those of Newton, Cowper, and Wesley. Few, if any, of Berridge's hymns are regularly sung today. However, there nevertheless remains an earthiness to Berridge's hymns along with a simple directness and honesty. Berridge taught his congregation to sing the truths of God's grace. Over time, the congregation knew these hymns and learned to sing them well - so well that ordinary folk such as John Skilleter were drawn by the singing to Berridge's church and ultimately came to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.<sup>26</sup> Like Berridge's sermons, his hymns were colourful and pragmatic. They taught the basic tenets of the Christian faith and described the trials and difficulties of the Christian life in terms that his rural congregation could understand, remember, and apply.

### ***Cheerful Piety (1792)***

Published at the time of his death, this collection of five letters was made available, according to the advertisement, to "promote serious cheerfulness" especially among young Christians and to help those "who wish to be serious, but not sad; lively, but not light and trifling; religious but not gloomy...to walk cheerfully in Wisdom's ways."<sup>27</sup> Rooted again in the sole merits of the atoning work of Christ, this series of letters explore the outworking of the Christian life.<sup>28</sup> Put differently, whereas *Christian*

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<sup>26</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>27</sup> "Cheerful Piety" in Berridge, *Works*, 340.

<sup>28</sup> Berridge's biographer, Nigel Pipworth suggests that the first three letters, addressed "To the Rev. B" were written by Berridge to himself. Pipworth, *Gospel Pedlar*, 176.

*World Unmasked* unpacked the doctrine of the justification by faith, *Cheerful Piety* explored the doctrine of sanctification.

In the first three letters, Berridge looked at the heart of a believer. In doing so, Berridge examined the nature of temptation, the influence that sin, hell and the world, and the role that “speculative sins” all have in a believer’s heart. Drawing from his own experience of temptation, Berridge urged the reader to turn to Jesus the Physician to “justify and acquit” and the Holy Spirit to “sanctify and cure the inward diseases” of the soul.<sup>29</sup> Berridge also encouraged his reader to look into the deceitfulness of his own heart and understand its “irregular turnings and windings” recognizing that a civil war rages within – “two men in one person, the old and the new man, flesh and spirit.”<sup>30</sup>

The fourth letter deals primarily with the issue of suffering in a Christian’s life. Written originally to “a Christian friend under sore trouble”, Berridge expressed sympathy to the woman who was experiencing suffering but warned her against supposing the troubles she encountered was a “token of God’s displeasure”. This, Berridge claimed, was “an old temptation of Satan’s with which he often assaults the afflicted christian.”<sup>31</sup> Sufferings were to be the common experience in the Christian life for they were the means to spiritual growth. Suffering teaches the people of God to identify with the sufferings of Christ, to “live more constantly by faith on Jesus Christ” and to remind them that this world is not their ultimate home.

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<sup>29</sup> “Cheerful Piety” in Berridge, *Works*, 343.

<sup>30</sup> “Cheerful Piety” in Berridge, *Works*, 345.

<sup>31</sup> “Cheerful Piety” in Berridge, *Works*, 352.

The final letter was originally directed to Lady Huntingdon. In the letter Berridge again dealt with the duplicity in his own heart. "I am often beseeching others to trust him with their all, whilst my own heart has been afraid to trust him with a groat." The key obstacle to spiritual growth, Berridge recognized, was that of surrender. Only when a Christian can give their all to Jesus, can they grow into the person He was created and redeemed to be. Drawing from his own experiences, Berridge writes, "The other day having asked him, when he would take me to his bosom, he answered, when I could humbly lie at his feet..."<sup>32</sup>

*Cheerful Piety* is highly autobiographical and due to its composition, thematically uneven. However, as one sifts through the content of each letter, a picture of the Christian life begins to emerge – a life fraught with temptations both within and without, a life that encounters and embraces suffering, and a life that ultimately demands complete surrender. In each letter, Berridge draws from his personal struggles to grow spiritually and uses these struggles as the means to teach others about the challenges of sanctification and the dynamics of spiritual growth. Published just prior to his death, many who knew Berridge and read *Cheerful Piety* recognized that the vicar lived as he taught. Berridge was a man who understood the place of struggle and suffering in the Christian life and though he experienced his share, the life he lived was "religious but not gloomy."

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<sup>32</sup> "Cheerful Piety" in Berridge, *Works*, 357.

## CHAPTER 10

### BERRIDGE AND CONTROVERSY

Despite its non-creedal emphasis and orientation towards unifying essentials, Evangelicalism and Methodism experienced its share of controversy throughout the eighteenth-century.<sup>1</sup> For his part, John Berridge disliked controversy and attempted to avoid it when he could. This aversion to debate was captured in the words to a hymn he wrote in the late 1760s:

One cries, I am for Paul;  
And one Apollos takes;  
Each thinks his leader all in all,  
And wild dissension makes.

If carnal feuds appear  
Where gospel truth is taught,  
Sweet love is quickly banish'd there,  
And Jesus Christ forgot.

The gospel suffers harm,  
And infidels blaspheme,  
When fierce disciples lift their arm,  
And raise a party flame.

Yet oft, full oft we see,  
Much unbecoming strife;  
Nor sheep nor shepherds can agree

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<sup>1</sup> At the center of most of the conflicts stood Methodist John Wesley. It was often Wesley's personality – the combination of an autocratic leadership style, personal stubbornness and sharp intellect – which drove him to be at odds first with George Whitefield and then with practically everyone else associated with the Revival. Beginning with the Free Grace controversy between Wesley and Whitefield (1739-1741), continuing with Wesley's conflict with the Moravians (1740), the controversy over the Maxfield-Bell Perfectionism Revival (1758-63) and culminating with, perhaps, the most acrimonious debate – the Calvinist Controversy (1770-1773), conflict seemed to follow Wesley wherever he went. For an excellent treatment of the events surrounding the Calvinist Controversy, see L.E. Elliot-Binns, *The Early Evangelicals: A Social and Moral History* (Greenwich, UK: The Seabury Press, 1953), 196-208.

To lead a peaceful life.

From thy disciples, Lord,  
Such carnal strife remove,  
Subdue them by thy gracious word,  
And teach them how to love.<sup>2</sup>

To Berridge, the proliferation of theological disputes which raged throughout the eighteenth-century too often degenerated into impassioned argument and succeeded only in generating more heat than light. In the midst of the Calvinist controversy, Berridge wrote to his friend, John Thornton lamenting the harsh exchanges taking place between Calvinist Augustus Toplady (1740-1778) and Arminian John Fletcher (1729-1785). "I was afraid that Mr. Toplady and himself [Fletcher] were setting the Christian world on fire, and the carnal world in laughter, and wished they could both desist from controversy."<sup>3</sup>

Given his reluctance to engage in heated debate, it is surprising that Berridge did wade into the stormy waters of the Calvinist controversy through the publication of his *The Christian World Unmasked, Pray Come and Peep* and by engaging in a disputation with Arminian and intellectual heavyweight, John Fletcher. What prompted Berridge, after resisting involvement in past controversies, to finally enter this particular contest?

Part of the answer to this question lies in Berridge's connection with John Wesley – a connection which early in his ministry could be described as rather strong. Wesley visited Berridge in Everton on a number of occasions between 1758 and 1762

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<sup>2</sup> "Hymn 57" in John Berridge, *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Berridge, with a Memoir of His Life by the Rev. Richard Whittingham* (London: Paternoster Row, 1864), 222.

<sup>3</sup> "Letter from Berridge to John Thornton, September 25, 1773" in Berridge, *Works*, 378.

and regularly preached at Berridge's church. However, after 1762, Wesley never returned to the town nor contacted Berridge again.<sup>4</sup> What happened to the partnership that once existed between these two men?

It was in the year following the Everton Revival that Wesley grew increasingly impatient in his dealings with Berridge. In April, 1760, Wesley wrote a blunt letter to Berridge criticizing him on many counts: first, Wesley was frustrated with Berridge's stubbornness and arrogance in not accepting his views.<sup>5</sup> "I believe you retained your own opinion in every one and did not vary a hair's breadth." "Does this not imply...something of self-sufficiency?" Second, Wesley complained that Berridge showed resistance to joining his Methodist societies; third, Berridge also refused to hand out Methodist literature to his congregation and according to Wesley, thus "discouraging the new converts from reading: at least from reading any thing but the bible." Wesley then writes, "I can hardly imagine, that you discourage reading even our little Tracts out of jealousy, lest we should undermine you, or take away the affections of the people." Finally, Wesley criticized Berridge for the audacity to re-write some of his brother, Charles Wesley's hymns. "In very deed it is not easy to mend his hymns, any more than to imitate them."

Berridge's defence for his actions was more restrained. He explained that his emphasis on the Bible over Methodist Tracts was motivated by a desire that his

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<sup>4</sup> Wesley visited St. Neots, a village just six miles from Everton, nine times between 1775 and 1790 but there is no record of his contacting Berridge.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Smyth, *Simeon and Church Order* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 187-188.



parishioners read the Bible diligently.<sup>6</sup> “I discourage the reading of any books, except the Bible and the Homilies, not because of the jealousy mentioned by you, but because I find that they who read many books, usually neglect the Bible...” As for re-writing Charles Wesley’s hymns, Berridge again had his parishioners’ best interests in mind. When Berridge wrote his own hymns, he wrote them with an eye to the illiterate state of much of his congregation. To Berridge, simplicity of language and plainness of style was preferred over sophistication and refinement.<sup>7</sup> Any changes to Charles Wesley’s hymns, to Berridge, were necessary for the overall spiritual benefit of his parish members. In the end, Berridge welcomed Wesley to “call at Everton” if he passed through Bedford. In fact, Wesley did visit Everton in February, 1761 and again in January, 1762 (when Berridge was away), but never returned again. By 1763, the estrangement between Wesley and Berridge had grown wide indeed. In March that same year, Wesley wrote to Lady Huntingdon complaining about an increasing opposition to his efforts and listed the clergy who he perceived were opposing his efforts. In the list of names, Wesley included Berridge.<sup>8</sup>

For Berridge’s part, his growing difficulty with Wesley stemmed from two sources: *his own personality and his decision to embrace Calvinism in the late 1760s*. Like Wesley, Berridge often acted independently and could be exceedingly stubborn at times. His refusal to come under the authority of Wesley and his Methodist societies no doubt caused Wesley much consternation and frustration. This independence streak

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<sup>6</sup> Smyth, *Church Order*, 189.

<sup>7</sup> “Preface to Sion’s Songs or Hymns” in Berridge, *Works*, cxcviii.

<sup>8</sup> Nigel Pibworth, *The Gospel Pedlar: The Story of John Berridge and the Eighteenth-Century Revival* (Welwyn, Hertfordshire: Evangelical Press, 1987), 104.

was consistent in Berridge throughout his life. It shows up in Berridge's treatment of Wesley and in many of his other relationships - his bishop, Lady Huntingdon, and his friend and benefactor, John Thornton.

The second source of difficulty with Wesley stemmed from the shift Berridge experienced in the late 1760s from Arminianism to Calvinism. During this time, Berridge began to grow uneasy over some of Wesley's theological views which were developing, especially his views on Christian Perfection. What was particularly alarming to Berridge were the claims of Christian Perfection that some of Wesley's followers particularly the London Methodists, George Bell, and Thomas Maxfield were making.<sup>9</sup>

In many ways, it was Berridge's deep self-understanding that solidified his shift away from Wesley's Perfectionism towards moderate Calvinism. Berridge was painfully conscious of the sinfulness of his own heart and the optimism of attaining perfection as expressed theologically by Wesley and experientially by Bell and Maxfield simply never rang true for Berridge. The human heart, Berridge contended, would never be fully rid of sin. In a letter to John Newton in 1771, he underlines this sentiment by writing:

How sweet is the mercy of God, and how rich is the grace of Jesus, when we have had an awful peep into our hearts! This makes us prize the gospel, embrace the Saviour, and fly to his cross. At times I am so overwhelmed with the filth and mire of my nature, that I can scarcely look through it unto Jesus.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Berridge made a point of visiting Bell in London. Whittingham describes his meeting. "Mr. Berridge said, 'I have heard, Mr. Bell, that you say, you shall be carried up to heaven in a chariot of fire.' 'So I shall,' replied Bell, in a tone of uncommon exultation. 'Indeed!' added Mr. Berridge, 'then you will be highly honoured. May I request one favour of you? Having always given you a cordial reception when you have visited me at Everton; I have some small claim on your kindness.' 'Most assuredly,' answered Mr. Bell, 'shall I be ready to grant you any favour that is in my power.' 'When you are carried up to heaven in a chariot of fire,' replied Mr. Berridge, 'I request that you will grant me the honour of being your postilion.'" Noting the sarcasm in Berridge's voice, Bell angrily stormed away. "Memoir" in Berridge, *Works*, li-iii.

<sup>10</sup> "Letter to John Newton, March 13, 1771" in Berridge, *Works*, 363.

To Berridge, part of the process of sanctification was not a recognition that sin is absent in the heart, but rather a humble acknowledgment that sin - even the smallest of sins - still lingered in the human heart. Berridge explained to his friend John Thornton, "As the heart is more washed, we grow more sensible of its remaining defilement: just as we are more displeased with a single spot on a new coat, than with a hundred stains in an old one."<sup>11</sup>

This shift towards Calvinism and his growing network of friends – most of whom were moderate Calvinists – led Berridge to break with Wesley and the Methodists. For his part, Berridge did attempt to reconcile with his old friend in 1768 when he wrote Wesley a letter. In it, Berridge expresses his regret over their broken relationship. "I see no reason why we should keep at a distance, whilst we continue servants of the same Master...Though my hand has been mute, my heart is kindly affected toward you."<sup>12</sup> Berridge expressed sadness and fatigue over recent disputes and extended again an invitation for Wesley to visit Everton to stay and preach.

As for Wesley, he had clearly broken with his former ministry partner and Arminian friend. In 1772, during the midst of the Calvinist Controversy, Wesley compared the Everton revival with the revival which occurred ten years later in Weardale (County Durham). In his journal, Wesley spitefully expressed his misgivings over the genuineness of the Cambridgeshire Revival compared to what had occurred in Weardale. Of course, there seemed to be surface similarities in spontaneity and how quickly it spread, but to Wesley there were far more people in Weardale that were

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<sup>11</sup> "Letter to John Thornton, November 10, 1773" in Berridge, *Works*, 382.

<sup>12</sup> Smyth, *Church Order*, 190.

“converted to God.” Although there was a similarity in outward signs, there “were none of the dreams, visions, and revelations, which abounded at Everton.” What’s more, to Wesley, much of what was witnessed in Everton though initially thought as being genuinely from God was actually “counterfeited by the devil.” In the end, Wesley criticized the shallowness of the Everton revival and concluded that it had lacked adequate leadership with those who did emerge as leaders as being little more than “babes in Christ.”<sup>13</sup>

Berridge’s shift towards Calvinism seemed to Wesley a betrayal and led to his reassessment of their shared experiences in Everton. In addition to his adding doubt to the authenticity of the Everton revival, Wesley demonstrated a degree of peevishness by deciding to publish in 1780 his 1760 letter of criticisms (minus Berridge’s reply).

Tensions were not eased when the Calvinist Controversy broke out in the early 1770s. During this time, Berridge solidified his association with the Calvinist camp when he published his work, *The Christian World Unmasked*. Berridge’s biographer, Nigel Pibworth, observed that Berridge demonstrated a degree of naïveté in publishing his work at that particular time. Though *Unmasked* was in many ways a devotional work with an evangelistic emphasis, its Calvinist tenor and its attack against “sincere obedience” made it difficult not be utilized as a resource in the larger debate that was raging at the time. When Swiss-born John Fletcher responded to Berridge in his *Logica Genevensis or The First Part of the Fifth Check to Antinomianism*, and listed Berridge in

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<sup>13</sup> John Wesley, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley A.M Volume IV* (New York: B. Waugh and T. Mason, 1835), 379.

the very title of his work, Berridge showed genuine surprise at the both the attention his work had elicited and the intensity of the argument thrown against him.

What complicated matters further was the publication of some verses allegedly written by Berridge in *The Gospel Magazine* entitled “The Serpent and the Fox; or, an Interview between old Nick and old John” which many took as a scathing attack against John Wesley. Church historian Robert Southey claimed that Berridge was indeed the author of the verses. Other biographers are not as certain.<sup>14</sup> Given that Berridge genuinely disliked controversy, it is unlikely that he did pen the verses. Nevertheless, the combination of their publication and the publication of *Unmasked* brought Berridge into the center of the fray.

His opponent, John Fletcher had met Berridge during the early days of the Cambridgeshire Revival and shortly afterwards became vicar of Madeley where he remained for twenty-five years.<sup>15</sup> Throughout his days, Fletcher remained a close friend and associate with both John and Charles Wesley.<sup>16</sup> When the Calvinist Controversy broke out, Fletcher sided with Wesley and wrote his main work, *Checks to Antinomianism*. Though lengthy and complicated, the purpose of the work was to attack

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<sup>14</sup> Smyth writes, “But the internal evidence is very inconclusive; and the external evidence makes this identification exceedingly improbable, for Berridge plainly deplored the controversy, and would have been the last man deliberately to inflame it.” Smyth, *Church Order*, 186; Berridge’s biographer Nigel Pibworth also suggested that Berridge in all likelihood did not pen the verses. See Pibworth, *Gospel Pedlar*, 127-128.

<sup>15</sup> In 1759, Lady Huntingdon had arranged for Fletcher to visit Berridge in Everton. Upon his arrival, apparently Fletcher did not reveal who he was, but when hearing his slight accent and learning he was of Swiss origin, Berridge soon figured out his identity. Thereupon Berridge invited Fletcher to preach at his church the next day. Sir Marcus Loane, *Cambridge and the Evangelical Succession* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2007), 62-63.

<sup>16</sup> John Wesley asked Fletcher on a number of occasions to be his assistant and then his successor. In the end, Wesley outlived Fletcher by six years. , Donald M. Lewis ed. *Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730-1860, Volumes 1 & 2* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 393-394.

the Calvinist position and demonstrate how the doctrine of election leads to antinomianism. When *Unmasked* was published, Fletcher turned his attention and applied his brilliant mind to attacking Berridge's work.

To Fletcher, Berridge's disparagement of "sincere obedience" in the Christian life led inexorably to antinomianism. Sincere obedience was not a *condition* for salvation, but was still integral to the Christian life. To Fletcher, *Unmasked* in its criticism of sincere obedience was teaching that how one lives the Christian life did not, in fact, matter.

In many ways, Berridge's *Unmasked* provided an easy target for Fletcher. Berridge's work, far from being organized and focused in argument, was often rambling and unclear. This was partly due to Berridge's purpose behind the work which more pastoral than theological. In writing *Unmasked*, Berridge was directing his readership to discover what he had himself discovered in the late 1760s, that is, the sufficiency of the work of Jesus Christ is the sole foundation for one's salvation and that no combination of faith and works (i.e. "sincere obedience") will serve as a sufficient means to gain salvation. To Berridge, justification by faith alone was so integral to his own spiritual journey that any hint of a doctrine of works-righteousness needed a response.

The epistolary duel between Fletcher and Berridge was carried out between 1773 and 1774. As it progressed, it became clear that Berridge was intellectually outmatched. Fletcher did acknowledge Berridge's strength of character and personal piety by writing in his Introduction:

Before I mention his mistakes, I must do justice to his person. It is by no means my design to represent him as a divine who either leads a loose life, or intends to hurt the Redeemer's interest. His conduct as a Christian is exemplary; his labours

as a minister are great; and I am persuaded that the wrong touches which he gives to the ark of godliness are not only undersigned, but intended to do God service.<sup>17</sup>

However, Fletcher's dissection of *Unmasked* was less polite.

Mr Berridge's propositions are Antinomianism unmasked, if he extends their meaning (as his scheme does) to finished salvation, and to a life of glory, unconditionally bestowed upon adulterous backsliders. For sincere obedience, or the good works of faith, are a condition (or, to use Mr Berridge's word, 'a term',) indispensably required of all, that stay long enough upon the stage of life, to act as moral agents.<sup>18</sup>

The ferocity of Fletcher's attack against *Unmasked* clearly surprised and unsettled Berridge. In a letter to his friend, John Thornton, Berridge complained that Fletcher has misunderstood his points:

I thought no professor could misunderstand me; but in a letter just received from Mr. Fletcher, he writes thus, 'What you have said about sincere obedience, has touched the apple of God's eye, and is the very core of Antinomianism. You have done your best to disparage sincere obedience, and in a pamphlet, ready for the press, I have free exposed what you have written.' Then he cries out in a declamatory style, 'For God's sake, let us only speak against insincere and Pharisaical obedience.' Indeed, I thought I had been writing against insincere and Pharisaical obedience throughout the pamphlet; and that every one who has eyes, must see it clearly: but I suppose that Mr. Fletcher's spectacles invert objects, and make people walk with their heads downwards.<sup>19</sup>

In the end, Berridge admitted to learning a lesson out of this whole experience. He concludes:

We learn nothing truly of ourselves, or of grace, but in a furnace. Whatever Mr. Fletcher may write against my pamphlet, I am determined to make no reply. I dare not trust my own wicked heart in a controversy. If my pamphlet is faulty, let it be overthrown; if sound, it will rise up above any learned rubbish that is cast

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<sup>17</sup> John Fletcher, *Logica Genevensis continued: or, the Second Part of the Fifth Check to Antinomianism* (London: Wesley's Printing House, 1789), 5.

<sup>18</sup> Fletcher, *Logica Genevensis*, 15.

<sup>19</sup> "Letter to John Thornton, August 18, 1773" in Berridge, *Works*, 373.

upon it. Indeed, what signifies my pamphlet or its author? While it was publishing I was heartily weary of it; and have really been sick of it since, and concluded it had done no good because it had met with no opposition.<sup>20</sup>

Although this could have marked the end point in Berridge's connection with Fletcher, there does exist an interesting anecdote about the two men offered by a Rev. G.J. Gorham in a letter dated February, 1793 – after both Berridge and Fletcher had died. In the letter, Gorham wrote of a meeting which took place in December, 1776 in Everton between Fletcher and Berridge. According to Gorham, the two former adversaries “embraced each other with tears of affection” and proceeded to reminisce about their past exchanges. Gorham then recounted that he and his two friends left the company of Fletcher and Berridge for two hours only to return and find them in deep conversation. “Mr. F. prayed fervently and affectionately; and having concluded, all were about to rise from their knees, when Mr. B. began to pray in language equally warm and loving with that of his dear brother.” Gorham concludes that Berridge had then paid a friendly visit to Fletcher the following spring in London.<sup>21</sup>

From his difficult experiences with Wesley, Fletcher, and the Calvinist Controversy, Berridge learned his lesson and refused to get embroiled in controversy again. Towards the end of his life, he wrote to Benjamin Mills, “Through mercy I have neither ability nor inclination for controversy, which often proves a Gospel bear-garden,

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<sup>20</sup> “Letter to John Thornton, August 31, 1773” in Berridge, *Works*, 375.

<sup>21</sup> “Letter from the Late Rev. G.J. Gorham, February, 1793” in “Memoir”, Berridge, *Works*, xliii.



where the combatants are bruising each other and he that deals hardest blows seems the cleverest fellow.”<sup>22</sup>

This distaste of debate is also captured in an anecdote given by Berridge’s curate, Richard Whittingham. Whittingham writes, “When therefore an eminent minister, paying him [Berridge] a visit, inquired whether he had read certain works on the controverted points relating to Arminianism and Calvinism, he replied, ‘I have them on my shelves in my library, where they are very quiet; if I take them down, and look into them, they will begin to quarrel and disagree.’”<sup>23</sup> As he grew older, Berridge became increasingly convinced that the acrimonious debate as experienced in the 1770s was not helpful to the soul and, not surprisingly given his experience with Wesley and Fletcher, detrimental to one’s “peaceful state of mind.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> “Letter from Berridge to Benjamin Mills, November 17, 1784” in *The Congregational Magazine, New Series Vol. IX* (London: Jackson and Walford, 1845), 275.

<sup>23</sup> “Memoir” in Berridge, *Works*, xviii.

<sup>24</sup> “Memoir” in Berridge, *Works*, xviii.

## CHAPTER 11

### BERRIDGE AND FRIENDSHIP

One of the distinguishing characteristics of early evangelicalism was its development of informal clerical networks.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the second generation of evangelicals and Methodists which actively worked on forging formal domestic and transatlantic connections, early bonds were established primarily through a shared evangelical vision, a habitual exchange of pulpits, the regular use of the familiar letter to interact over news and ideas, and resulting friendships which only deepened over time and through shared experiences.<sup>2</sup>

Central figures of the Revival, though living and travelling at varying distances from each other, were remarkably well-acquainted with one another. Not surprisingly, those living in closer proximity had greater opportunity for regular connection and at times organized themselves into Clerical clubs with the goal of fanning into flame the sparks of revival witnessed in their neighbouring parishes.<sup>3</sup>

Through these informal networks, deep friendships were formed and it was through these friendships that much of the work of revival was carried out. More

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<sup>1</sup> See Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 240-256.

<sup>2</sup> For a survey of Transatlantic Evangelicalism, see Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America, 1790-1865*. Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 1978.

<sup>3</sup> In a letter from nonconformist minister, Pisdon Darracott to Henry Venn in 1754, Darracott makes reference to the emergence of such networks in the parish of noted evangelical, Samuel Walker of Truro. He writes, "One day in a month is set apart for the meeting of neighbouring Clergymen, a scheme of our worthy Friend, which God has blessed to the awakening Ministers, who from careless, and formal Preachers are become livers, and preachers of the everlasting Gospel." The purpose of these clerical networks, Darracott continues, was to "strengthen each other's Hands in the work of ye Lord, and that the good Effects of it have already spread through their several Parishes, and seems likely to diffuse its influence yet much further amongst Clergy and Laity. G.C.B. Davies, *The Early Cornish Evangelicals, 1735-60*, (London: S.P.C.K., 1951), 172-173.

importantly, it was through the strength of these friendships that “awakened” curates and vicars, often isolated in their pastoral work, were able to *sustain their evangelical vision* and pass this vision to the following generation.

Friendship mattered a great deal to John Berridge. As Berridge’s evangelical convictions expanded so too did his network of friends, and it was this informal network of friends which helped sustain Berridge’s evangelical vision throughout his ministry. This connection between friendship and vision was expressed in Berridge’s increasing willingness to share his pulpit and his house with neighbouring evangelical clergy, visiting preachers, and itinerating lay evangelists. These invitations combined with his own visitations to other pulpits served to keep the evangelical emphasis of evangelism and conversion on the forefront in Berridge’s life and ministry.

Of the visiting clergy, two of Berridge’s closest friends, John Newton (1725-1807) and Henry Venn (1724-1797) loom large in the history of the evangelical movement.<sup>4</sup> Both men had pastorates within twenty miles of Everton with Newton pastoring in Olney and Venn in neighbouring Yelling.

Newton had made Berridge’s acquaintance shortly after he arrived in Everton in 1758. During the winter that year, Newton wrote to his wife, Polly, “I have some thought of calling upon Mr. Berridge in my way and spending Sunday with him.” One week later, Newton again wrote home, “I reached Mr. Berridge on Sunday...and could not get away till Monday noon. I must be glad and thankful that Providence has

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<sup>4</sup> For an excellent biography on John Newton, see Jonathan Aitken, *John Newton: From Disgrace to Amazing Grace*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007). For Henry Venn, see Bill Reimer. ‘The Spirituality of Henry Venn’ in *Churchman*. (114/4), 2000.

permitted me to go there, though it has cost me two days more absence from you. He is a charming man and a wonderful work indeed is going on under his ministry, which I could never have rightly conceived of without examining upon the spot.”<sup>5</sup> Five years later, Newton left Liverpool and took up a curacy in Olney, Buckinghamshire. Berridge, already six years into his ministry at Everton welcomed the arrival of Newton to the region and a lively exchange of letters commenced leading to an ever-deepening friendship between the two men.

In 1771, Henry Venn, suffering from poor health, moved from the large parish of Huddersfield, Yorkshire to the quieter living in Yelling near Cambridge. Berridge’s relationship with Venn extended back to his days at Cambridge and so it was no surprise that he was delighted to hear the news of his friend’s arrival to his region. In fact, when Berridge wrote Newton in June inviting him to pay a visit to Everton, he also encouraged him to drop in on Venn on his way home to welcome him to the area. “[Y]ou might ride over, if you thought proper, to Mr. Venn, who is expected this week at Yelling, which is only nine measured miles from Everton.”<sup>6</sup>

One of the ways that the friendship between Berridge, Newton, and Venn served to sustain an evangelical vision was through the regular exchange of ideas, books, and writings. Newton often sent Berridge writing projects that both he and his friend and poet, William Cowper (1731-1800) had been working on. In doing so, Newton humbly solicited Berridge’s comments and critiques. In March, 1771, Berridge wrote to Newton

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<sup>5</sup> John Newton to his wife, December 28, 1758 and January 3, 1759 in Marilyn Rouse, Quotes: John Newton on John Berridge (unpublished).

<sup>6</sup> “Letter to John Newton, June 10, 1771” in John Berridge, *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Berridge, A.M., with a Memoir of his life by the Rev. Richard Whittingham* (London: Paternoster Row, 1864), 366.

thanking him for sending a collection of sermons (which he had already possessed) and his Ecclesiastical History that Newton had recently completed. Berridge comments:

I like your Ecclesiastical History much; but am rather sorry you have undertaken to carry it through; sorry for your sake, not the readers. I fear it will chill your spirit and deaden your soul. Much writing is pernicious. Besides, you must read over many dry and barren histories; you must bring to light many controversies, foolish or noxious, which had better lie buried fifty fathoms deep...<sup>7</sup>

When Newton and Cowper published their Olney hymns in 1779, Berridge was delighted to receive a copy of his friends' labour.<sup>8</sup> In a letter to John Thornton, Berridge gave the work his stamp of approval expressing special appreciation towards the accessible style of the hymns with "language intelligible to all believers; and the sense sufficiently closing at the end of each line."<sup>9</sup>

When Newton published his first set of letters as "Omicron" Berridge was not fooled by the pseudonym, but recognized the penmanship of his good friend. In 1775, Berridge wrote to Thornton exposing the hidden identity as he waited for an impending visit from both "Omicron" and Venn. "I suppose by the matter and style that shame-faced Omicron is Mr. Newton. He wears a mask, but cannot hide his face. Pithiness and candour will betray the Curate of Olney, notwithstanding his veil of a Greek signature. I expect him at Everton to-day, and a covey from Yelling Rectory."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "Letter to John Newton, March 13, 1771" in Berridge, *Works*, 363-364. It is ironic that Berridge wrote this right in the midst of the Calvinist Controversy in which he would become embroiled. See Chapter 8.

<sup>8</sup> Berridge himself had written his hymn book in 1774, but did not publish it until 1785.

<sup>9</sup> "Letter to John Thornton, July 27, 1775" in Berridge, *Works*, 395. There seems to be an error in the dating of this letter. It reads "1775", but it is placed in the chronological sequence of "1779". Given that the Olney Hymns were published in 1779, this date makes more sense.

<sup>10</sup> "Letter to John Thornton, August 10, 1774" in Berridge, *Works*, 385.

At times, honest feedback and too much forthrightness got Berridge in trouble with his friends. For example, in reviewing William Cowper's works, Berridge suggested that "a grain of insanity" ran through Cowper's poems with some lines being difficult to read and certain words as puzzling to the mind as a "Hebrew root."<sup>11</sup> Not surprisingly, Cowper was less than appreciative of the review and apparently indicated to Berridge as much. Realizing that he had perhaps been a bit too frank in his comments, Berridge backtracked and sought to make amends. In a letter to Newton, Berridge wrote, "I did not expect a reply from Mr. Cowper, but came off as well as I could expect. It is beneath a good poet to heed the vituperation of a crazy old Vicar."<sup>12</sup> From that point, Berridge was largely complimentary to Cowper indicating in a letter in 1785 that his poems "were excellent" but had "too much gospel for the world, and too little for most believers."<sup>13</sup>

Even as late as 1788, Berridge still regularly offered feedback and constructive criticisms of the written publications of his friends. In fact, that year Berridge undertook the task of editing and adding commentary to a project that his good friend, John Thornton was working on: the revision of the daily devotional, Bogatzky's *Golden Treasury*. In a letter that year, Berridge assured his friend that he would devote his "leisure hours" to the work at hand, but warned Thornton that his itinerant preaching schedule would restrict how much time he could spare in the project. In the end though, Berridge committed to do his best and hoped for his "favourable acceptance of it."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Letter to John Newton, April 13, 1782" in Berridge, *Works*, 406.

<sup>12</sup> "Letter to John Newton, September 17, 1782" in Berridge, *Works*, 408.

<sup>13</sup> "Letter to John Newton, November 12, 1785" in Berridge, *Works*, 417.

<sup>14</sup> "Letter to John Thornton, September 21, 1788", in Berridge, *Works*, 521.

Living in close proximity with one another offered numerous opportunities not only for visits, but also to preach in one another's pulpits. Throughout the correspondence between Newton, Venn, and Berridge are numerous references to pulpit exchanges. Over the years, Berridge and Venn entered each others' respective pulpits with regularity. On November 22, 1771, Venn wrote, "Last Wednesday Mr. Berridge was here, and gave us a most excellent sermon. He is a blessed man – a true Calvinist; not hot in doctrine, nor wise above what is written, but practical and experimental."<sup>15</sup> Again on December 7, 1773, "Dear Mr. Berridge preaches for me every month; happy am I in having such a loving, fervent minister of Christ."<sup>16</sup>

To Berridge, the habitual exchange of pulpits was a healthy exercise for pastors to undertake not simply for evangelistic reasons, but also for promoting the personal growth of a minister. In 1771, thanking Newton for making the journey to Everton that summer, Berridge promises to return the favour and then reflects on the practice, "I trust your labour of love is not in vain. Removing from camp to camp is of use to a Christian soldier, and more especially to a Christian sergeant. It shakes dust from our clothes, and rust from our joint, and promotes activity, the true spirit of a soldier. Without excursions we are apt to grow timid, and to settle on our lees."<sup>17</sup>

Pulpit exchange was not always an easy endeavour. Rural roads were sometimes made impassable because of inclement weather thus making travel – even short distances – difficult. Adding to the logistical challenges was the opposition that was

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<sup>15</sup> "Letter to the Rev. James Stillingfleet, November 22, 1771" in Henry Venn, *The Letters of Henry Venn* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1993), 191.

<sup>16</sup> "Letter to Miss. Wheler, December 7, 1773" in Venn, *Letters*, 206.

<sup>17</sup> "Letter to John Newton, October 18, 1771" in Berridge, *Works*, 367.

frequently shown towards evangelicals such as Berridge in various towns. In the fall of 1773, Berridge wrote to Newton hoping that his “dear neighbour, Mr. Venn” would take the letter to Olney. Early that year, Berridge had planned to send another letter to Newton only to discover that Newton was already planning to make another visit to Everton. Desiring to return the favour, Berridge informed Newton that he longed to make a journey to Olney but his controversial work, *Christian World Unmasked* had stirred up trouble in Bedford, his mid-way travel point from Everton to Olney thus preventing him from making the journey. Berridge meekly concludes his letter by writing, “I hope Mr. Venn’s visit will provoke a returning visit from you this autumn, and I entreat you not to pass by Everton without warming a bed and a pulpit. If the Lord gives me strength, I will pay off all my debts; but if I am forced to be insolvent, do you act like a generous Christian, and continue your loans.”<sup>18</sup>

Through their visitation and correspondence, Berridge, Newton, and Venn often kept watch for “newly enlightened” or potential young preachers in the area that they could encourage and mentor. In 1780, Berridge wrote to Newton that he was planning to preach at a parish church in Ickleford where “Mr. Peers...is newly enlightened to preach Jesus, and desires help from evangelical brethren. Sixteen years ago I preached in one of his neighbouring barns, and now am invited to preach in his church.”<sup>19</sup> Berridge then notes of another “gospel curate” in the neighbouring town of Royston and remarks that “Christ is opening many doors to spread the gospel.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> “Letter to John Newton, September 20, 1773” in Berridge, *Works*, 376-377.

<sup>19</sup> “Letter to John Newton, December 12, 1780” in Berridge, *Works*, 402.

<sup>20</sup> “Letter to John Thornton, September 17, 1782” in Berridge, *Works*, 407.



Emerging alongside the “newly enlightened” gospel preachers in the region were certain young men who had evangelical inclinations and were seeking entry into the pastorate. It was these men that Berridge regularly sought out and actively mentored. One such young man was Henry Venn’s son, John Venn (1759-1813). Berridge was extremely fond of the young Venn and wrote as much to John Thornton in 1781 expressing his admiration of not only John but all of Venn’s family, “Jacky is the top branch of the tree, highest and humblest. His abilities seem equal to anything he undertakes, and his modesty is pleasing to all that behold him.”<sup>21</sup> From all indications, Berridge remained connected to John Venn, often writing letters of spiritual counsel and encouragement, until his dying days.<sup>22</sup>

Another remarkable young man that caught the attention of Berridge, Newton, and Venn was a young Charles Simeon (1758-1836).<sup>23</sup> When Simeon was only twenty-four, he served as Curate of St. Edward’s in Cambridge and though young and inexperienced, his preaching was powerful and effective. Word of his success reached Berridge’s ears and he wrote to his friend, John Thornton, “Mr. Simeon, a young Fellow of King’s College, in Cambridge, has just made his appearance in the Christian hemisphere, and attracts much notice. He preaches at a church in the town, which is crowded like a theatre on the first night of a new play.”

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<sup>21</sup> “Letter to John Thornton, November 24, 1781” in Berridge, *Works*, 404. Berridge’s evaluation was prescient, for John Venn went on to become a major evangelical Anglican clergyman and key founder of the Christian Missionary Society. See Don Lewis, ed., *Dictionary of Evangelical Biography, 1730-1860* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 2004), 1140-1141.

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter 13.

<sup>23</sup> See James Houston, ed., *Evangelical Preaching: An Anthology of Sermons by Charles Simeon* (Vancouver, BC: Regent Publishing, 1986), xv-xxv.

Venn and Berridge recognized the potential in young Simeon and as years progressed, both men had an almost competing interest in shaping the trajectory of this young pastor's career. Recognizing Simeon's evangelistic gifts, Berridge openly encouraged him to follow in his footsteps and engage in itinerant preaching. Venn, however, disagreed with this course of action. Knowing that such a practice would severely hurt Simeon's chances of being ordained in the Church of England, Venn sought to dissuade Simeon from itinerating and criticized him for his early attempts.

Needless to say, the "gospel pedlar" John Berridge was not impressed with Venn's influence over the young man and in a letter to Thornton in 1785, he lamented the control that "the Archdeacon of Yelling" (as he referred to Venn in this case) seemed to have over Simeon. In the letter, Berridge referred to Simeon as a "brave christian sergeant" who had "the true spirit of an evangelist" but who was being restrained by Venn. In the end, Berridge exhorted Thornton to speak to Venn about this, "[L]ay your cane soundly on the Archdeacon's back, when you see him, and brush off his heathen grief else it may spoil a christian sergeant."<sup>24</sup> Despite Berridge's efforts, Venn's influence won the day and Simeon never itinerated again.

One young man on whose life Berridge did succeed in having a lasting influence was Rowland Hill (1744-1833).<sup>25</sup> Converted through the influence of his brother Richard, young "Rowly" soon gained the reputation as a fearless evangelist. In 1764, news of this young man reached Berridge and the vicar wrote to Hill and invited him to pay a visit:

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<sup>24</sup> "Letter to John Thornton, July 12, 1785" in Berridge, *Works*, 414.

<sup>25</sup> See Edwin Sidney, *The Life of Rowland Hill* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1835).

I am now at Grandchester, a mile from you, where I preached last night and this morning, and where I shall abide till three in the afternoon – will you take a walk over? The weather is frosty, which makes it pleasant under foot.<sup>26</sup>

Hill did in fact “take a walk over” to visit Berridge and that encounter marked the beginning of a lifelong mentorship between the two men. Following this meeting, Hill met with Berridge on a weekly basis visiting Everton each Sunday before returning to St. John’s College in Cambridge. Through Berridge’s influence, Hill organized his own “holy club” at the university, carrying out works of charity, prison visitation while itinerating throughout the region.

However, Venn’s warning to Simeon about the negative impact that itineration may have upon receiving Orders proved to be true in the case of Hill. After his graduation, no less than six bishops refused to ordain him thus prompting the young man to experience a deepening anxiety. In 1770, Berridge wrote to Hill encouraging him to “stand still and not to hurry.” He then continued, “Be not anxious about orders; they will come as soon as wanted; nor be anxious about any thing but to know the Lord’s will, and to do the Lord’s work. One of your Master’s titles is Counsellor, and a wonderful counsellor he is.”<sup>27</sup>

As Hill continued to itinerate, Berridge regularly sent him letters expressing his affection and offering encouragement towards the young man. In 1771, Berridge wrote a timely letter to his discouraged friend, “Dear Rowly, My heart sends you some of its kindest love, and breathes its tenderest wishes for you. I feel my heart go out to you

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<sup>26</sup> Sidney, *Rowland Hill*, 34.

<sup>27</sup> Sidney, *Rowland Hill*, 60-61.

whilst I am writing, and can embrace you as my second self.” Berridge then encouraged Hill to continue in the Lord’s work and not to give up. “I think your chief work for a season will be to break up fallow ground. This suits the accent of your voice at present. God will give you other tongues when they are wanted; but now he sends you out to thrash the mountains, and a glorious thrashing it is. Go forth, my dear Rowly, wherever you are invited into the devil’s territories; carry the Redeemer’s standard along with you; and blow the gospel-trumpet boldly fearing nothing but yourself.”<sup>28</sup>

In 1773, Hill finally was ordained as deacon, but was prevented by the Archbishop of York from taking Priest’s Orders. He remained deacon throughout his life “wearing” as he would put it, “only one ecclesiastical boot.”<sup>29</sup> Despite this, Hill went on to be a significant figure in the history of the evangelical movement. In retrospect, it is not difficult to see the wide-ranging impact that Berridge had upon his life. Like Berridge, Hill was an effective evangelist. Similarly, he was willing to operate within the Church of England, but was at the same time committed to parochial ministry, embracing the gospel freedom to minister wherever and however he deemed necessary, yet always striving towards church unity.<sup>30</sup>

Berridge’s influence was not lost on Hill. He recognized the lasting impact that his mentor had had upon his long ministry career. In a stirring tribute to his mentor, Hill wrote, “[M]any a mile have I rode, many a storm have I faced, many a snow have I gone

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<sup>28</sup> Sidney, *Rowland Hill*, 67-68.

<sup>29</sup> Lewis, ed., *Dictionary of Evangelical Biography*, 553.

<sup>30</sup> Back in 1771, Berridge reiterated his dislike for controversy by writing to Hill, “The late contest at Bristol seems to turn upon this hinge, whether it shall be *Pope John* [referring to John Wesley] or *Pope Joan* [referring to Lady Huntingdon]. My dear friend, keep out of all controversy, and wage no war but with the devil.” Sidney, *Rowland Hill*, 398. Knowing that Berridge himself waded into the Calvinist Controversy two years later, Sidney noted that Berridge should have followed his own excellent counsel. See Chapter 9.

through, to hear good old Mr. Berridge; for I felt his ministry, when in my troubles at Cambridge, a comfort and blessing to my soul. Dear affectionate old man, I loved him to my heart.”<sup>31</sup>

The effectiveness of evangelical ministers such as Simeon and Hill bears testimony to the commitment that the first generation of evangelicals had to invest in the lives of a new generation of evangelicals that were emerging on the scene. Despite the difference of opinion regarding itinerancy, the bonds of friendship between Berridge, Venn, and Newton never broke. And it was their friendship which served to sustain their evangelical vision throughout their ministry lives and which was passed on to the likes of Simeon and Hill.<sup>32</sup>

It is worth noting that Berridge’s friendship with Newton continued even after Newton left the region. In 1780, Newton left Olney and moved to London’s St. Mary Woolnoth. Despite the increased distance, Berridge continued to seek advice from his friend regarding potential pulpit suppliers. That very year, Berridge wrote to Newton about a pulpit supply reference that had been given to him and again demonstrated his concern for their mutual evangelical vision by asking “Is he moral; is he also evangelical? Can he preach without notes; and will he condescend to visit some neighbouring

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<sup>31</sup> Sidney, *Rowland Hill*, 169.

<sup>32</sup> All three men had significant influence on the next generation of evangelicals. For Venn, his primary influence was over his son, John, over Charles Simeon and John Ryland (1753-1825). As we have seen, Berridge’s greatest influence was over Rowland Hill. Newton’s influence was perhaps the greatest of the three – actively mentoring such young evangelicals as John Ryland, Richard Cecil, William Jay (who was also influenced by Rowland Hill) and most importantly, William Wilberforce. For an excellent exploration of Newton’s mentorship of John Ryland, see Grant Gordon, ed., *Wise Counsel: John Newton’s Letters to John Ryland Jr.* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009).

country town once a week, and give a sermon or an exhortation in a barn or a house? Is he also a single man? A speedy answer to these queries will be esteemed a favour.”

Later, in the same letter, Berridge brought Newton up to date about their mutual friend, Mr. Venn who “has been traversing the mountains of Yorkshire for ten weeks, and is returning home this week full of power, I hear, stout in body, and vigorous in spirit.” Referring to Newton’s new pastoral situation, Berridge expressed his hope that Newton would find his new London parish an opportunity for a great evangelistic work. “I hope you find some refreshing seasons in your new barn floor, and some grain beating out of the straw.” Berridge then concludes his letter with a touching sentiment, “Present my very kind christian respects to Mrs. Newton; and if you could peep into my bosom, you might see how much you are loved and esteemed by J.B.”<sup>33</sup>

Throughout the 1780s, the three friends endured the travails of old age and challenges of travel in order to visit one another.<sup>34</sup> In 1782, Venn noted in a letter to James Stillingfleet that Berridge had preached to his people in Yelling. He then wrote, “I think his voice grows weaker. He is sixty-eight in February – a great age for one who has laboured so much.”<sup>35</sup> In 1788, Venn wrote to his son, John and shared with him that he had paid John’s mentor and his friend a visit in Everton where the two men again shared pulpits. On the Sunday, he and Berridge both preached – Berridge in the morning and Venn in the afternoon. The experience prompted Venn to reflect on the impact that the

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<sup>33</sup> “Letter to John Newton, December 12, 1780” in Berridge, *Works*, 402.

<sup>34</sup> On one occasion, both Newton and Venn travelled to Everton together in a chaise. As they left Everton and journeyed to neighbouring Potton, the chaise overturned causing injury to both men. “Letter to John Thornton, October 27, 1787” in Berridge, *Works*, 425. Fortunately, neither Newton nor Venn were seriously injured. Venn wrote in December that year, “I feel not the least hurt from my late accident.” “Letter to Mr. Elliot, December 7, 1787” in Venn, *Letters*, 458.

<sup>35</sup> “Letter to the Rev. James Stillingfleet, December 24, 1782” in Venn, *Letters*, 354-355.

passing years had had upon their lives. "Four years have passed since we heard each other. We both perceived how our voices were weakened; but had a sweet interview, while we talked together of the pity and tender love of our adorable Master towards all His aged ministers, when they are almost past the service of their office."<sup>36</sup>

By 1791, all three men were experiencing the effects of old age. In two years, Berridge would die; four years later, Venn too would pass away. Newton would outlive both men, not dying until 1807. However, the impact that the friendship between Newton, Venn, and Berridge had upon the early evangelical movement is inestimable. Through their friendship, each pastor was able to sustain his evangelical vision for evangelism, seeking the conversion of lost souls, preaching the Word of God, and living a cruciform life. Through their friendship, this evangelical vision did not fade upon their death, but was passed on to the next generation of young evangelicals whose impact both locally and globally would outpace their mentors' influence.

One figure who perhaps understood the impact of this friendship network clearest was writer and poet, William Cowper. Though he had to endure Berridge's criticism of his poetry, Cowper nevertheless recognized the wide-spread influence that Newton, Venn, and Berridge were having on the lives of so many. In a letter to Newton in 1791, Cowper knew that the labours of Newton, Venn, and Berridge were coming to an end and expressed his appreciation towards the three friends, "I am sorry that Mr. Venn's labours below are so near to a conclusion...Were I capable of *envying*, in the strict sense of the word, a good man, I should envy him and Mr. Berridge and yourself,

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<sup>36</sup> "Letter to the Rev. John Venn, June 19, 1788" in Venn, *Letters*, 462.

who have spent, and, while they last, will continue to spend, your lives in the service of the only Master worth serving; labouring always for the souls of men."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Venn, *Letters*, 148.



## CHAPTER 12

### ECCENTRICITY AND HUMOUR

#### *Berridge's Call to Singleness*

John Berridge never married. The life of matrimony was, in Berridge's thinking, incompatible to the hardships that a life of constant itinerancy demanded and would hinder his effectiveness in field preaching. In a letter to Lady Huntingdon, Berridge does not shy from sharing his thoughts about the dangers and pitfalls of the married life. He writes, "No trap so mischievous to the field-preacher as wedlock, and it is laid for him at every hedge corner." Marriage, according to Berridge, had already taken its toll on too many of his acquaintances. It had "quite maimed poor Charles [Wesley], and might have spoiled John [Wesley] and George [Whitefield], if a wise Master had not graciously sent them a brace of ferrets. Dear George has now got the liberty again and he will escape well if he is not caught by another tenterhook."<sup>1</sup>

In 1762, Berridge himself had once considered seeking a wife but believed that God had miraculously saved him by directing him to a passage in 2 Esdras 10:1.<sup>2</sup> Realizing that this directive both ambiguous and was located in a non-canonical book, Berridge prayed again. This time there was no doubt in Berridge's mind that he was to remain single, for he believed that God led him to read Jeremiah 16:2, "Thou shalt not take thee a wife, neither shalt thou have sons or daughters in this place." Though Berridge's exegesis and application to the decision-making process is questionable, the

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<sup>1</sup> John Berridge, *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Berridge, A.M., with a Memoir of his life by the Rev. Richard Whittingham* (London: Paternoster Row, 1864), Letter to Lady Huntingdon, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1770, 508.

<sup>2</sup> "When my son was entered into his wedding chamber, he fell down and died."

passage in Jeremiah nevertheless convinced him that he was not to pursue marriage and remain content with the life of a bachelor.<sup>3</sup>

Despite his reasoning and decision to remain single, it cannot be argued that Berridge was against marriage *per se* or that he held misogynistic views regarding women in general. In his *Sion's Hymns or Songs*, Berridge penned hymns occasioned by wedding ceremonies and which gave tribute to marriage as a whole:

Our Jesus freely did appear  
To grace a marriage feast;  
And, Lord, we ask thy presence here,  
To make a wedding guest.

Upon the bridal pair look down,  
Who now have plighted hands;  
Their union with thy favour crown,  
And bless the nuptial bands.

In purest love their souls unite,  
And link'd in kindly care,  
To render family burdens light,  
By taking mutual share.<sup>4</sup>

Despite his misgivings over the effects of wedlock on the life of the itinerant preacher, Berridge often concluded his correspondence with his friends by extending his love and care to their wives. What's more, Berridge's letters of spiritual counsel were directed to

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that Berridge did encounter at least one opportunity to marry. Whittingham records a specific occasion when Berridge was visited by a lady who traveled by carriage from London to Everton to solicit Berridge's hand in marriage. Upon arrival, the lady assured Berridge that the Lord had revealed to her that she was to become his wife. To which Berridge replied, "Madam, if the Lord has revealed it to you that you are to be my wife, surely he would also have revealed it to me that I was designed to be your husband; but as no such revelation has been made to me, I cannot comply with your wishes." Apparently, the lady returned to London deeply disappointed. Berridge, *Works*, liv.

<sup>4</sup> "Hymn 289" in Berridge, *Works*, 312.

women as well as men with both genders being treated in terms with deep respect and consideration.

### ***Berridge's Eccentricity***

God's perceived call to singleness, though possibly a benefit to itinerant preaching, did not serve to improve Berridge's already growing reputation for eccentricity.<sup>5</sup> Friends and foes alike, while admiring Berridge's considerable gifts and talents, often were perplexed and distressed by his raciness of language and inter-personal oddities. This eccentricity expressed itself on a number of levels. It is found in his sermons, in his publications, but most of all, in his correspondence.

John Thornton, though a committed and devoted friend to Berridge, was frequently frustrated by Berridge's eccentricity and misplaced use of humour. In a lengthy letter, Thornton expressed his growing displeasure towards Berridge's use of humour in sermons and in his writings suggesting that these traits were unbecoming of a man of his position. He writes to his friend, "Wit in any person is dangerous and often mischievous when used improperly, and especially on religious subjects; for as the professing part of an audience will much longer retain a witty or low expression than one more serious...I remember you once jocularly informed me you was born with a fool's cap on; pray, my dear sir, is it not high time it was pulled off?"

Ironically, Berridge's response is filled with the very wit and vein of humour that Thornton found discomfiting. In his letter, Berridge extends his appreciation for the honest words of his dear friend, but then writes, "As to myself, you know the man: odd

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<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 1.

things break from me as abruptly as croaking from a raven. I was born with a fool's cap...a fool's cap is not put off so readily as a night-cap. One cleaves to the head, and one to the heart."<sup>6</sup>

Once when an admirer wrote an overly formal letter to the old vicar, Berridge's response was colorful, humorous, and humble. "One toad may croak to another, but, sure, it would raise a smile on your face to hear one toad compliment another, and speak very handsome things of his toadship."<sup>7</sup> On another occasion Berridge offered advice to a young pastor who questioned Berridge on how to share the Gospel when guests are received into the home. Berridge's response displayed considerable innovation to say the least. He exhorted the young man to do the following: "Keep a barrel of ale in your house; and when a man comes to you with a message, or on other business, give him some refreshment, that his ears may be more open to your religious instructions."<sup>8</sup>

How is one to understand Berridge's eccentricity? Was he simply a "buffoon" as Southey contends? In many ways, Berridge falls into the well-used category of the English eccentric. As Wheaton College's Alan Jacobs explains - the English love their eccentrics, because they are a "testimony to the community's gentleness, tolerance and humor."<sup>9</sup> Berridge certainly was a "character" and cared little about what others thought of him and his eccentricity. Put positively, it can also be said that Berridge

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<sup>6</sup> "Letter from John Thornton to John Berridge, October 17, 1775" in Berridge, *Works*, 522-523; "Letter to John Thornton, October 22, 1775" in Berridge, *Works*, 524.

<sup>7</sup> "Letter to Samuel Wilks, April 11, 1775" in Berridge, *Works*, 387.

<sup>8</sup> Berridge, *Works*, liii.

<sup>9</sup> Alan Jacobs, *The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C.S. Lewis* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 2005), 207.

demonstrated a rare quality in class-conscious eighteenth-century England: he simply treated everyone he met or with whom he corresponded on an equal footing.

It was through his conversion experience and the humbling effects of his subsequent illnesses that Berridge came to a deep understanding of his own spiritual depravity and his need for salvation. Though he showed varying degrees of restraint in pointing out similar needs in others, Berridge nevertheless lived his life and related with others holding to what he knew to be true: the ground was indeed level at the foot of the cross of Christ. Over time most of his friends grew to appreciate this quality in Berridge and though it can certainly be said that Berridge had numerous opponents, he had relatively few enemies.<sup>10</sup>

In the end, though the eccentricity that Berridge demonstrated in his lifetime certainly has been viewed by historians both hostile and sympathetic as a fundamental weakness or character flaw, it also could be argued that within this eccentricity, within this frequent use of humour, one can find a trace of what Ignatius of Loyola coined, “a holy indifference” in Berridge. Berridge not only treated the people he encountered the same, but also he honestly cared little about people’s opinions of him – positive or negative. From the time of his conversion in 1758 until his death, what ultimately mattered to “Ass of Everton” – as Berridge liked to call himself - was Jesus Christ – knowing him, living out his calling, walking with him, and proclaiming him to all with whom he came into contact.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Many of Berridge’s opponents were later reconciled to him. See Chapter 9.

<sup>11</sup> Cited in *The Argosy: A Magazine of Tales, Travels, Essays and Poems* (London: Strahan and Co., 1867), 448.

## CHAPTER 13

### SICKNESS, AGING, AND DEATH

Berridge struggled with recurring illness throughout his life. It was during his bout of poor health in the late 1760s that allowed Berridge to reflect on questions of Providence and free will, which in turn led him to shift from an Arminian position towards moderate Calvinism. While incapacitated for long stretches of time, Berridge grew to realize that the work of God was not dependent upon what he said or the role he played and that he was not as indispensable to the work of revival as he once thought.

It was a form of extreme asthma which particularly affected Berridge during the summer months in Everton. In June, 1771, Berridge wrote to Newton and described how the warm weather had laid him up and that he was struggling with a shortness of breath. This illness affected not only Berridge's ability to itinerate, but it prevented him from preaching at his own church any other time than on the Sabbath.<sup>1</sup> The same month Berridge described his condition to Rev. Housman writing, "As soon as the hot weather comes in, I am fit for nothing but to sigh and yawn."<sup>2</sup> Two years later, in the summer of 1773, Berridge writes that his sickness had returned again and had reduced him "to a mere Sunday preacher."<sup>3</sup> With the arrival of cooler weather also came relief from his asthma. This allowed Berridge to not only expand his ministry time at home, but also to take up again the task of itineration.

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<sup>1</sup> "Letter to John Newton, June 10, 1771" in John Berridge, *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Berridge, A.M., with a Memoir of his life by the Rev. Richard Whittingham* (London: Paternoster Row, 1864), 366.

<sup>2</sup> "Letter to Rev. R. Housman, June 3, 1771" in Berridge, *Works*, 527. Interestingly, Berridge noted in this same letter that George Whitefield also suffered from a similar affliction.

<sup>3</sup> "Letter to John Thornton, August 18, 1773" in Berridge, *Works*, 371.

Asthma plagued Berridge throughout his life and affected his ministry greatly. Though debilitating, the effects were not without some spiritual benefit. For, it was during times of infirmity that Berridge took time to reflect upon the spiritual state of his own heart. In many ways, the suffering Berridge endured led him to look deeply at his own heart, its waywardness, and the perceived need to depend upon God's strength at all times and in all seasons.

By 1780, compounding the effects of his chronic asthma was the fact that Berridge was beginning to feel the effects of his old age. To his long-time friend, John Thornton (who was four years younger than Berridge), he wrote of how old age was beginning to affect him physically. He writes, "Old age, with its winter aspect, creeps on me apace. My mind waxes feeble as well as my limbs; my windows grow dark, my memory leaks, and my grinders are few."<sup>4</sup> Six years later, Berridge complains "My ears are now so dull, they are not fit for converse; and my eyes are so weak, I can read but little, and write less."<sup>5</sup>

At the age of seventy-two, Berridge's body was beginning to wear out. In a letter to Thornton in 1788, Berridge brought himself to somewhat sheepishly ask his friend for some financial aid to replace a missing front tooth.

Almost sixty years have I lived, and never yet thanked God for my teeth; such a wretch am I! Nor did I know their real worth till last Friday, when I lost an upper tooth in the front of my mouth, which has made my speech so perplexed, disgusting, and painful, that I scarce know how to bear myself. Twice the labour and breath are required in speaking, yet will not suffice to articulate my words; every sentence comes out with a hiss, and I am quite ashamed to speak at all. Some concern for this loss were not amiss; but why am I ashamed? Yet so

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<sup>4</sup> "Letter to John Thornton, October 20, 1780" in Berridge, *Works*, 400.

<sup>5</sup> "Letter to John Thornton, October 11, 1786" in Berridge, *Works*, 422.

ashamed am I lest my lisping should make me appear ridiculous, that I cannot prevail on myself to step out a-preaching. Is not this pride with a witness?

To his further embarrassment, Berridge described his attempt to creatively solve his dental problems himself – an attempt which went horribly awry. He continues in his letter, “Accordingly we filled up the cavity on Sunday with white wax, which served indifferently well in the morning, but my pellet dropped out in the afternoon service during sermon, and made me conclude abruptly.”<sup>6</sup> Berridge finishes his letter by reluctantly asking for £10 to procure the services of a dentist in London.

The journey to London which Berridge took every winter was becoming too strenuous for the aging vicar.<sup>7</sup> As a result, he longed to spend the remainder of his days in Everton. “Everton,” Berridge writes, “suits me best, where I can be alone, with the word of God for my companion, and leisure enough for musing and prayer.” The difficulties which accompanied one’s final years were not lost on Berridge. “Troublous times are coming, I fear” he writes to Thornton, “but two things comfort me; the Lord reigneth, and my life is drawing towards its close.”<sup>8</sup> In one of Berridge’s last letters, written to Benjamin Mills, Berridge writes, “The windows of my house grow dimmer, scarce give a straight line, or spell a word right, and dislike a pen much.”<sup>9</sup>

Though physically Berridge was growing feeble, his mind nevertheless remained sharp and he began to reflect deeply on the meaning of growing old and the prospect of

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<sup>6</sup> “Letter to John Thornton, September 21, 1788” in Berridge, *Works*, 519-520.

<sup>7</sup> Berridge’s trip to London the following year was especially difficult. On his way, Berridge’s horse fell down and would not get back up and Berridge was left “sitting cold in a chaise” until a passing wagoner helped him out. “Letter to John Thornton, January 10, 1789” in *The Gospel Magazine, Volume IV. No.IV.,* April, 1839, 148.

<sup>8</sup> “Letter to John Thornton, December 30, 1788” in Berridge, *Works*, 430.

<sup>9</sup> “Letter to Benjamin Mills, November 23, 1790” in Berridge, *Works*, 436.



dying. There are two letters from 1792 which particularly reveal Berridge's thoughts on these matters. Both letters are to women and both letters reveal with great frankness the challenges Berridge was facing as he entered his seventy-seventh year. The first of the letters was written less than a year before his death, on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1792 to a Miss L.

Dear Lissey,

Once more I am paying a corresponding visit to you, and others, expecting it to be my last on account of my eyes, which are growing so dim, that I can read but little of what I love dearly, the precious word of God. I now lament the many years I spent at Cambridge in learning useless lumber, that wisdom of the world which is foolishness with God. I see nothing worth knowing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified; for him to know is life eternal. Follow him at all times, and let your heart dance after him, as David danced after the ark. And when he comes into your bosom hold him fast, and turn all other company out. He loves to be alone with his bride. You may find him in the shop, or in the street, if you seek him there; and often whisper in his ear, 'Dear Jesus, come and bless me!' If he sometimes surprise us with his visit, and comes unexpectedly; yet he loves to see the doors open, and the bosom waiting for him. Many kind visits are lost through a gadding heart; therefore keep at home with the Lord and let him hear much of your loving talk, and tell him all your wants, and all your grievances, and cast all you care upon him, and hide nothing from him. Lean firmly upon him, and he will cheer your heart in every trying hour, and bring you safe at last to his eternal home, where sin and sorrow never come; but where joy and peace for ever dwell. In this world we must expect tribulation; it is the christian's fare, and comes because it is wanted, and stays no longer than whilst it is wanted. Hereafter he will make us know, if not before, that he hath done all things well.

I am very feeble in body, but as well as I should be, and must suffer my heavenly Physician to prescribe for me. My kind respects attend you all and Nathan. Peace be with you, my dear Lissey, with spiritual health and joy in the Lord. The Lord give us a happy meeting above. Farewell.

J.B.<sup>10</sup>

That summer, Berridge offered the following reflections to a Mrs. E. about the physical, emotional, and spiritual challenges associated with growing old. He writes:

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<sup>10</sup> "Letter to Miss L---, May 6, 1792" in Berridge, *Works*, 436-437.

My Dear N.

You ask me how I do? eyes very dim, ears deaf, head much shattered, and spirits very low, yet much exempt from pain. Here my Jesus shews his tenderness, he knows his old horse can scarce carry his legs, and he will not overload him. I am apt to think the Lord may continue me here a year or two longer, because he has sent me a supply for that time. Having lost my benefactors, I was thinking what I must do; Go on and trust, was the word.<sup>11</sup> When we are low, Satan will batter us with unbelief. I dare not argue with Satan, but cast myself at Jesus' feet, committing soul and body to him, asking and expecting his assistance, it is not long before it comes with a loving reproof: 'O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?' "The last two Sundays I was led to church and into the pulpit; my voice was feeble but hearable, and Christ was precious. Oh, to see Jesus as he is, and surrounded with his ransomed people, hearts full of love pouring out hallelujahs, and filling heaven with his praise! Thanks to my Jesus for putting me in the way of his kingdom, and for holding me on hitherto; give me, dear Lord, a safe and honourable passage through the wilderness, and a joyful entrance into Canaan. The Lord bless you, with great and endless blessings, and keep you under his care. Amen.

J.B.<sup>12</sup>

Though Berridge was able to continue preaching nearly until his dying days, he found it increasingly difficult. In the only printed sermon of his available, Berridge preached at the Tabernacle on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1792.<sup>13</sup> In the message, Berridge acknowledges that his days were indeed drawing to a close, yet was thankful to God for the calling to preach. Berridge prayed for the leadership of the tabernacle and then expressed his heartfelt desire to preach all of his remaining days. "I know not whether I shall ever return any more; nor is it needful for me to know; but this I know, if the Lord continues my life, and allows me some measure of strength, I shall crawl up again."<sup>14</sup> Sadly, the

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<sup>11</sup> Berridge's long-time friend and benefactor, John Thornton had died in 1790.

<sup>12</sup> "Letter to Mrs. E--, August 2, 1792" in Berridge, *Works*, 438.

<sup>13</sup> It is indeed a great pity that only one transcribed sermon of Berridge's exists today.

<sup>14</sup> "Last Farewell Sermon, April 1, 1792" in Berridge, *Works*, 613.

strength never returned and Berridge was unable to return to the beloved chapels in London.

### ***Berridge's Death***

By the end of 1792, Berridge's health was failing fast. In 1792, Henry Venn wrote to his son, John that he had visited Berridge recently and found that his faculties were deteriorating quickly. He then writes, "But, in this ruin of his earthly tabernacle, it is surprising to see the joy in his countenance, and the lively hope with which he looks for the day of his dissolution."<sup>15</sup>

Though still planning to visit London in January as was his custom, the aged vicar could not manage the journey. On Sunday, January 20<sup>th</sup>, Berridge grew steadily weaker and only with great difficulty was able to reach his bed. A visiting friend remarked that Berridge was quite ill, but "extremely cheerful." Berridge then told his friend that he had thought that he would have died that day, but realized that he would still have to wait awhile.<sup>16</sup> As it turned out, the "worn-out servant" did not have to wait long. Two days later, on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1793, John Berridge of Everton died. His curate, Richard Whittingham was present with Berridge during the final hours. He commented to his beloved mentor and vicar, "Sir, the Lord has enabled you to fight a good fight, and to finish a truly glorious course...Jesus will soon call you up higher." To which Berridge replied, "Ay, Ay, Ay, higher, higher, higher."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Henry Venn, *The Letters of Henry Venn* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1993), 501.

<sup>16</sup> "The Life of Rev. Houseman" in Berridge, *Works*, xlv

<sup>17</sup> Berridge, *Works*, xxxii.

Though asked to preach the funeral sermon, Berridge's dear friend, Henry Venn was himself too old and ill to carry out the request. Instead the task fell to Charles Simeon to preach the funeral message of his mentor. In a letter to James Harvey, Venn described the solemn events of the day:

His funeral was very solemn. Six clergymen bore the pall. Mr. Simeon preached from the very words I wished him to do; and shewed how truly Mr. Berridge might say, with Paul, 2 Tim. iv. 7-8: 'I have fought a good fight: I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.' The church could not contain more than half of the multitude who came to the burial of their beloved pastor. Nor is it easy to conceive what tears and sighs were to be seen and heard, from those who had been called to Christ through the word of the dear deceased. He is gone, a very little before me. May I patiently wait till I meet him above! – an event which I hope is not far off.<sup>18</sup>

Venn would outlive his dear friend by four years dying on June 24, 1797.

The location where Berridge chose to be buried bears noting, for it underlines the pastoral heart he displayed throughout his life towards those far from Christ. Berridge's tomb is placed on the north-east side of the Church yard where the poor, the outcasts, and those who had experienced ignominious ends were buried. By choosing to be buried there, Berridge hoped, as a final act, to consecrate that particular part of the Church yard thus removing any disgrace in being buried there and serving as a reminder that Christ's saving grace is extended to everyone – poor and rich alike.

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<sup>18</sup> "Letter to the Rev. James and Mrs. Harvey, February 14, 1793" in Venn, *Letters*, 519.

## CHAPTER 14

### CONCLUSION

#### ***Berridge and the Evangelical Revival***

Two years before John Berridge's death, Mr. Joseph Hobbs' visited the aging vicar and informed him of the recent passing of the Countess of Huntingdon. Upon hearing the news, Berridge sighed, "Ah! Is she dead? Then another pillar is gone to glory. Mr. Whitefield is gone, Mr. Wesley and his brother are gone, and I shall go soon." Hobbs, in an attempt to sooth Berridge, emphasized the hope that they would be reunited in heaven. To which Berridge readily agreed with a smile and said, "Ay, Ay, that we shall; for the Lord washed our hearts here, and he will wash our brains there."<sup>1</sup>

Despite the recent proliferation of scholarship examining the development of eighteenth-century Evangelicalism, it is surprising such little attention has been directed to the life and ministry of John Berridge and the Cambridgeshire Revival. To read John Berridge's name alongside such major participants of the Evangelical Revival - George Whitefield, John and Charles Wesley, and Lady Huntingdon - may strike students of the period as a little strange. But should it? Part of the purpose of this study has been to show how the life of John Berridge significantly intersected with not only these major figures, but also with other notable leaders of early Evangelicalism as John Newton, Henry Venn, Rowland Hill, and Charles Simeon, while also standing at the center of a major revival of the period. When this is taken into consideration, it might better be

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<sup>1</sup> Berridge, John, *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Berridge, A.M., with a Memoir of his life by the Rev. Richard Whittingham* (London: Paternoster Row, 1864), lii-liii.

asked how Berridge's name has been overlooked by contemporary historians to the degree that it has.

The task of this study has been to re-introduce John Berridge as an important figure in the history of the Evangelical Revival and within the wider scope of eighteenth-century English Evangelicalism. By revisiting his largely forgotten life, it has attempted to acquaint the modern reader to John Berridge in all his roles - as a revivalist, an itinerant preacher, a writer, a mentor, a correspondent, but most importantly and accurately, a faithful pastor.

To accomplish this aim has required an exploration of the key dynamics which lay behind Berridge's life and ministry – dynamics which enabled Berridge to have a lasting impact on the people he encountered and the places where he ministered. The most important dynamic was the influence that the *personal appropriation of the doctrine of grace* had upon his life and ministry.

It was John Berridge's appropriation of the post-Reformational experiential tradition with its re-discovery of *justification by faith* that was foundational to his conversion and to his life as a pastor. On a human level, it was Berridge's personal understanding of this doctrine that served as an impetus to the Cambridgeshire Revival and shaped his activity in it. Finally, it was the doctrine of grace that carried Berridge through the revival and lay behind his commitment to faithfully serve as a pastor for the remainder of his days.

To Berridge, the critical event of his life occurred ten days after Christmas, 1757. Having grown weary of four years of ineffective preaching, Berridge heard the divine

instruction, "Cease from thine own works, only believe."<sup>2</sup> Recognizing that he had been attempting to earn his salvation through the gospel *and works*, Berridge resolved from that point onwards to depend solely on Christ's completed work on the Cross as the basis for his salvation. This applied also to Berridge's preaching. From that moment forward, Berridge resolved to proclaim nothing else but Jesus Christ and the Cross. Throughout his days, Berridge never forgot this key event in his life. *Justification by faith* would become the keystone for Berridge's conversion, his renewed sense of pastoral calling, and would sustain him through a life of pastoral ministry.

It was Berridge's appropriation of the doctrine of grace that figured significantly in the Cambridgeshire Revival. Though many who heard him preach were initially "surprised, alarmed, and vexed" with Berridge's new manner of preaching, they were soon deeply affected. In Berridge's words, a renewed focus on the completed work of Christ on the Cross was crucial to what transpired in the ensuing months. "[A]s soon as ever I preached Jesus Christ, and faith in his blood, then believers were added to the church continually, then people flocked from all parts to hear the glorious sound of the gospel, some coming six miles, others eight, and others ten, and that constantly."<sup>3</sup> The more Berridge preached on the insufficiency of good works to save, the more people began to ask, "What must I do to be saved?" *Justification by faith alone* was Berridge's constant answer. It was this doctrine personally appropriated that shaped Berridge's

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<sup>2</sup> Berridge, *Works*, xiv.

<sup>3</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone" in Berridge, *Works*, 351.

preaching, compelled the “riding pedlar” to itinerate throughout the region, and ultimately stood behind the events of the Cambridgeshire Revival.<sup>4</sup>

It was Berridge’s personal appropriation of the gospel of grace that also brought him *through* the extraordinary events of Cambridgeshire Revival to the other side. To get to this place, however, Berridge’s understanding of the doctrine of grace first had to undergo a deepening process. Shortly after the Revival ended, the events of the past year had taken their toll on Berridge’s health. Weary and worn out, Berridge experienced a period of incapacitating illness which severely curtailed his ministry work. Surprisingly, during this same period, Berridge’s church continued to flourish. Through this, Berridge’s sense of God’s sovereignty deepened as did an awareness of his own dispensability. It slowly began to dawn that God could carry out His Kingdom work without the help of Everton’s vicar. Perhaps embarrassed over his perceived self-importance during in the Cambridgeshire Revival, Berridge seldom made reference to the events of the Revival after its close. It was this growing appreciation of God’s sovereignty that enabled Berridge to transition from occupying center stage during a spectacular revival to being content with his calling as a rural pastor in the village of Everton.

Finally, it was this appropriation of the doctrine of grace that *sustained Berridge throughout his ministry days* and lay at the foundation of his deep humility, his sense of

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<sup>4</sup> “Cheerful Piety” in Berridge, *Works*, 356. Specific events of the revival are still puzzling. The ecstatic phenomena and the prevalence of paroxysms, groaning and “violent outward symptoms” (as Wesley put it) are difficult to interpret. Though this study has offered suggestions as to their meaning, it is nevertheless an area that requires further research.



humour, his network of friends, his spiritual counsel, and the content of his writings. Throughout his ministry to his dying days, Berridge held tightly to the truth that his right standing before God was entirely based on the merits of Christ's atoning work on the Cross and not on anything he could offer.

Anecdotes of Berridge's humility were never in short supply. In a funeral sermon offered by Rev. W. Holland on the occasion of Berridge's death, the pastor shared a story of Berridge's humility:

Going once to attend a visitation he was joined by a stranger, who was also a clergyman; after some conversation the stranger asked Mr. B. if he knew one Berridge in those parts, whom he had heard was a very troublesome, good-for-nothing fellow? 'Yes,' rejoined Mr. B., 'I know him, and do assure you that whatever you may have heard, one half of his wickedness has not been told you.'<sup>5</sup>

Though Berridge's self-descriptions of his sinfulness and depravity both here and throughout his letters could, at times, be construed as a form of self-loathing, they are again best understood within the context of the gospel of grace.

Berridge believed that apart from Christ, he was spiritually lost and this awareness only deepened when he embraced Calvinism. Equally important, Berridge also maintained that because of the merits of Christ's atonement, he had been saved from the penalty of his sins and had been adopted into a relationship with God the Father. Living in these twin truths cultivated in Berridge both humility and a rich sense of humour. In humility, Berridge recognized the depravity in his heart - a recognition which only deepened over time. Late in life, he wrote to John Thornton, "[P]ride

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<sup>5</sup> "The Christian's Warfare and Crown: A sermon occasioned by the death of the Rev. John Berridge by the Rev. W. Holland" in Berridge, *Works*, 630-631.

besiegeth my heart, besetteth all my steps, and meets me at every hedge corner. It has more heads than the Nile, and more shapes than Proteus, and every week I discover some new prints of its foot. Henceforth if you ask my real name, it is Pride, and such an odd mysterious evil is it, I can even be proud of loathing my pride.”<sup>6</sup> If Berridge was not impressed with himself, by extension he also was not impressed with anyone else - regardless of their rank or station. Consequently, Berridge often broke social convention of the time and treated persons of nobility (such as Lady Huntingdon) in a similar manner as he would anyone else.

The doctrine of grace also provided the basis for Berridge’s ever-present yet eccentric sense of humour. As he grew older, Berridge began to see with increasing clarity the absurdity that God, in His grace, would use “Everton’s ass” to proclaim the gospel. Though Berridge took the gospel message with absolute seriousness, he seldom took himself in the same way. Recognizing that he was stuck with his “fool’s cap” on, Berridge constantly encouraged others to recognize their own.

In the end, humility and humour won over the hearts of many adversaries and led to deep friendships. No doubt figures such as John Thornton, Lady Huntingdon, William Cowper, and John Wesley were frequently aggravated by Berridge’s apparent impertinence towards them yet, in the end, all save Wesley were reconciled to the vicar. Though Berridge was guilty of being overly direct in his manner, lacking tact, and frequently causing offense, it can be said that when he did offend, he was swift to admit his faults and seek forgiveness. In his remaining years, the humble vicar had few

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<sup>6</sup> “Letter to John Thornton, September 21, 1788” in Berridge, *Works*, 519.

enemies and was deeply loved by friends from different ecclesiastical traditions and drawn from different sides of the theological divide.

These friendships Berridge deeply valued. It was through this wide network of friends – which included such notable Methodist and evangelical figures as John and Charles Wesley (at least, initially), John Fletcher, John Newton, Henry Venn, George Whitefield, William Cowper, Rowland Hill, Charles Simeon, Thomas Scott, William Romaine, Martin Madan, James Hervey, John and Henry Thornton, Lady Huntingdon, and Cornelius Winter - that Berridge was able to sustain an evangelical vision throughout his life. Regular pulpit exchange, lively correspondence, the exchange of ideas, and frequent traveling enabled Berridge to remain apprised of the work that God was doing throughout the land especially in “awakening” local clergy to the evangelical cause. Some of these clergy, such as Rowland Hill and John Venn, Berridge invited to mentor and offered spiritual counsel through letters and frequent visitation. In having an active role in these young pastors’ lives, Berridge worked towards ensuring that evangelical movement and its emphasis on “experimental”, that is, “experienced” faith would carry through to the next generation.

### ***Learning from Berridge today***

What can the life and ministry of the eccentric vicar of Everton teach us today? This is a not an easy question to answer. The life and circumstances of an evangelical pastor ministering in a rural context two hundred years ago is radically different from the realities facing the church in the twenty-first century. Despite the chronological and cultural chasm, there do remain commonalities in the human heart which bridge over

history. Themes of sin and grace, though expressed differently in different times and circumstances, nevertheless are found throughout the shared experiences of humanity in history. Further, though the specific challenges that pastors face differ according to their cultural and historical context, there still remain common pastoral issues and principles which show up in every age from which one can learn and profit. This is certainly the case with the life and ministry of John Berridge of Everton. By way of conclusion then, it will be suggested that the vicar's life and experience can speak into the modern pastoral context in ten important ways.

First, John Berridge's life teaches the *necessity of receiving grace in order to effectively proclaim it*. Through his conversion experience, Berridge recognized that before the merits and benefits of the atoning work of Christ on the Cross could be proclaimed, this work must first be personally appropriated into one's life. Put differently, in order to effectively preach the gospel, one's heart needed to first be broken by it.

The lessons to be drawn from this first point should not be too difficult to see (but perhaps more difficult to apply). Like Berridge's first six years of ministry, many pastors today find themselves attempting to preach the fruit of grace without beginning with its source. It is imperative for pastors to re-discover, as Berridge himself did, that moral teaching disconnected from the saving work of Jesus Christ can not bring about lasting spiritual transformation. Only the completed work of Jesus Christ on the Cross, personally appropriated, can radically bring about lives that are truly and lastingly transformed.

The second lesson is related to the first. The entire Christian life – conversion and growth – is *best understood in crucicentric terms*. To Berridge, the work of sanctification was inseparable from the work of Christ on the Cross. This understanding was emphasized in a letter Berridge wrote in 1773 to John Thornton, “Upright people are often coming to me with complaints, and telling me, that since they received pardon, and have been seeking after sanctification, as a separate work, their hearts are becoming exceeding dry and barren. I ask them how they find their heart when Jesus shews his dying love. [H]oliness as well as pardon is to be had from the blood of the cross.”<sup>7</sup>

Again, this admonition speaks loudly into the contemporary pastoral context. There is no shortage of spiritual “tools” on offer today which, if carefully followed, promise to produce fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. However, as Berridge reminds us, any emphasis on spiritual growth or techniques to produce a transformed life which are not rooted in or which stray too far from the Cross of Christ may in fact not lead to greater “holiness” (as they promise), but more often than naught produce lives that are “dry and barren.”

Third, Berridge’s experience of the Everton Revival teaches us something about the nature of revivals themselves. That is: *revivals are surprising, are often messy, and their results are difficult to evaluate*.<sup>8</sup> The Cambridgeshire Revival did not take place in a historical vacuum, but rather was part of a larger revival that had started two decades

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<sup>7</sup> “Letter to John Thornton, August 18, 1773” in Berridge, *Works*, 372.

<sup>8</sup> There are a few good studies on the nature of Revival. A classic study published in 1842 is W.B. Sprague, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1959). Walter Kaiser, more recently, published a study on revivals in Scripture and then applied to the current milieu. See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Revive Us Again: Your Wakeup Call for Spiritual Renewal* (Fearn, UK: Christian Publications, 2001).

earlier and was taking place on both sides of the Atlantic. That understood, there nevertheless remained a “surprising” dimension to the events which took place in 1759. They certainly surprised Berridge as well as Whitefield, Wesley, Romaine, and Madan. The Cambridgeshire Revival began rapidly in the summer of 1759, spread quickly especially to the north and east of Bedford, but by year’s end, subsided almost as quickly as it began.

The phenomena witnessed and recorded during the revival seldom were uniform or predictable, but consisted of a wide range of ecstatic expressions including groaning, trances, violence, and even the changing of participants’ facial colouring! Attaining a clear interpretation of any historical revival is no easy task and this certainly applies to the events described in the Cambridgeshire Revival.<sup>9</sup> Many of the primary eyewitnesses – such as Mrs. Blackwell and John Walsh - lacked the theological acumen and interpretive ability to describe much more than what they simply saw. As an unfortunate consequence, the content of Berridge’s preaching during the revival remains a mystery as does the degree of spiritual growth experienced by the revival participants.

However, there are hints that the revival did indeed bring lasting spiritual benefit to Everton and the surrounding area.<sup>10</sup> Here we turn again to John Wesley’s journal as a helpful source. In early 1762, Wesley visited Everton and found the congregation “numerous and lively” and “more settled” than his previous visit. Even more telling, in neighbouring Potton, Wesley made this observation, “What has God wrought here since

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<sup>9</sup> This is certainly an area where further research could be carried out.

<sup>10</sup> See chapter 6.

I saw this town twenty years ago! I could not then find a living Christian therein but wild beasts in abundance. Now here are many who know in whom they have believed..."<sup>11</sup> In Potton, as in Everton, the difference between the spiritual state of the land in the 1740s compared to the early 1760s can at least to some degree be attributed to the revival fires which burned throughout the area in 1759.

In recent years, a number of works have been published surveying global revivals which have taken place in the last century, their impact on the land in which they occurred, and the resulting spread of Christianity into regions where it had been hitherto unknown.<sup>12</sup> These works have served as an important corrective for they remind us that revivals are not simply a Western phenomenon from a by-gone age, but that they are still being experienced today in different corners of the globe. Further, in analyzing the dynamics of global revival, these works have helped explore the interplay between Providence and human agency in the revivals themselves. On one level, revivals can be approached as social phenomena rooted in socio-cultural forces which were distinct at the time. From a Christian perspective however, revivals are understood as the "surprising" work of God, given in grace, and carried out through the means of ordinary men and women and resulting in repentance and spiritual transformation.

Throughout the narrative of the Cambridgeshire Revival, one encounters ordinary men and women participating in something extra-ordinary. What is striking

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<sup>11</sup> John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Volume 21 – Journal and Diaries IV (1755-1765)*, eds. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), 347-349.

<sup>12</sup> See Mark Shaw, *Global Awakening: How Twentieth-Century Revivals Triggered a Christian Revolution* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010); Don Lewis, ed., *Christianity Reborn: The Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the Twentieth-Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2004); Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* Revised and Expanded edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

about pastors like John Berridge and Samuel Hicks is not primarily their giftedness, but rather their faithfulness. And it is this faithfulness in the midst of the extraordinary that may be transferable to today's pastoral context. Whenever one happens to find oneself in the midst of a surprising work of God, Berridge's experience can offer an example of an appropriate response. The call of the pastor, whether in the eighteenth-century or the 21<sup>st</sup>-century, is to be attentive to the work of God in his or her midst and to be willing to faithfully participate in His transforming work whatever its scale and duration.

Fourth, Berridge's experience at Everton is a reminder for pastors to *faithfully minister where they are called*. It is remarkable that Berridge, with his pastoral gifts and inter-personal connections, chose to remain in Everton all his days. Despite the repeated efforts of such figures as Lady Huntingdon to encourage Berridge to change pastorates, he resolutely chose to remain as a rural pastor in a rural town. To Berridge any change of pastoral situation needed first to be spiritually discerned and he regularly advised other pastors not to be wooed to other parishes simply in the hope of finding better ministering conditions. For example, in a letter to Cornelius Winter, Berridge warned his friend not to be too quick to leave his parish in England to move to America. "Be not in a hurry to go, lest you go without your passport, and then you go on a fool's errand. Do not wish to be any where but where you are, nor any thing but what you are. It is want of communion with God that makes our thoughts run a gadding." Winter wrote in response, "Oh, that I had never swerved from the good advice of this truly apostolical man!"<sup>13</sup> In another letter, Berridge is more blunt in his opinion of young

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<sup>13</sup> "Letter to the Rev. Cornelius Winter" (undated) in Berridge, *Works*, 443.



pastors who too quickly seek to change their curacies. "When young gossellers change their quarters speedily, and without constraint, I mistrust they are growing lousy, and will soon be eaten up with vermin."<sup>14</sup>

In a vocation that is increasingly viewed in careerist terms with ministry positions viewed as stepping stones towards career advancement, Berridge's example and advice has much to offer pastors today. Berridge's 37-year tenure in Everton is a reminder that pastoral ministry is a calling. The role of the pastors is to minister where they are called, to grow where they are planted, and to serve faithfully in their station until such a time when God may call them elsewhere.

The fifth application is related to the fourth. The life of John Berridge serves as both an example and a challenge for pastors *to know and love their congregations*. When preaching, Berridge communicated in a way that his largely illiterate congregation would understand and appreciate. His style was simple and plain, his preaching direct, and his focus was always on practical application of the spoken Word. His use of anecdotes was earthy and homey and he seldom shied away from using humour to drive home his point. His hymn compositions, though lacking in sophistication, nevertheless were written in manner that the uneducated could appreciate. "My hearers are of a sound Gospel class, very poor and simple-hearted, and cry out for the Bible."<sup>15</sup> Though criticized by his more refined colleagues and friends, Berridge's ministry revealed a deep understanding of the people whom God had called him to

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<sup>14</sup> "Letter to John Thornton, August 10, 1774" in Berridge, *Works*, 385.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Williams Dale and James Guinness Rogers, eds. *The Congregational Magazine, New Series, Volume IX* (London: Jackson & Walford, 1845), 27.

minister. What is even more striking is the ease by which Berridge then shifted his manner of preaching to the more sophisticated audiences in Lady Huntingdon's London chapels.

Today, many unhappy ministry tenures are the direct result of the pastor failing to understand the demographical, the educational, cultural and socio-economic background of the congregation to whom he or she has been called to minister. Part of one's calling as a pastor is to not only exegete Scripture, but also to exegete one's parish – to spend time in understanding the hearts and minds of those to whom God has called one to minister. Only when a congregation is deeply known can a pastor minister in ways that meaningfully intersect with the personal experiences of those in his or her parish.

The sixth lesson drawn from Berridge's life is recognizing *the value of friendship in a pastor's life*. Berridge's friendships, in particular, his friendship with John Newton and Henry Venn helped him sustain his evangelical vision throughout his life. Though he grew increasingly familiar with such figures as John Thornton and Lady Huntingdon, Berridge nevertheless continued to address them formally in letters as "Dear and Honoured Sir" or "My Lady". As his friendship with Newton developed, rather than using the customary "Dear Sir" to begin his letter, Berridge began to address Newton more familiarly as, "My Dear Brother". Frequent pulpit exchange, informal visits, the lively discussion of books and ideas, as well as the sharing of struggles and joys in ministry all served to deepen the bonds of friendship between the three pastors and maintained a shared vision for evangelism and the propagation of the Gospel throughout the land.

For an eccentric like Berridge – and an unmarried one at that – these friendships also benefited him personally. Friendship provided a necessary mirror to help him recognize his own foibles and shortcomings. Friendship offered Berridge the needed opportunities to speak honestly and openly with others and receive frank words of correction and rebuke. This also served to keep his notorious eccentricity somewhat in check by ensuring that he would be held accountable for his words and actions. Berridge’s friends all recognized that Berridge was an odd character, but they loved the eccentric vicar nonetheless. It was in this context of love, acceptance, and truth that Berridge’s ministry was sustained.

An aging Welsh pastor once remarked to a young minister just starting out, “Make your true friends early in ministry, because to be a pastor means that you are everyone’s friend, but nobody’s friend.”<sup>16</sup> Many pastorates are cut unnecessarily short because of two reasons: a moral failure or failure of vision. Lying behind both failures is often a dearth of meaningful friendships in a pastor’s life. The occupational hazard of being “everyone’s friend” requires putting on a mask and embracing the art of people-pleasing. This sometimes leads to the development of a “double-life” in which the public life is increasingly disconnected from the interior life of the pastor. Sadly, this dynamic is too often at work just before a moral failure occurs. What’s more, the desire to please ultimately undermines visionary leadership because it requires pastors to live *reactive* lives, that is, living in response to how members of the congregation may be feeling towards the pastor. When compelled to lead reactively, it is impossible to lead

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<sup>16</sup> Personal conversation in 2001 between Rev. John Davies and myself in Coquitlam, BC.

effectively. John Berridge's life reminds us of the inestimable value of friendship in a pastor's life. Friendship offers pastors a safe context in which they can speak honestly and openly. Further, friendship offers pastors a needed mirror to see their actions and behaviours clearly yet within a context of acceptance and love. Finally, friendship is a necessary ingredient for sustaining a Gospel-vision throughout one's ministry life.

John Berridge's life also offers insight into the art of mentoring. He demonstrates the *importance of mentoring to those above and below his station, as well as to his peers*. This is the seventh lesson to be drawn from the vicar's life. One of the keys to Berridge's ministry was his ability to mentor not only young pastors such as John Venn and Rowland Hill, his peers such as John Newton and Henry Venn, but also those who in terms of class and authority, stood above him. Evidence of this is found in Berridge's correspondence with John Thornton and Lady Huntingdon. Berridge (and many other evangelicals of the time, including John Newton) benefited greatly from both Thornton and Lady Huntingdon's generosity.<sup>17</sup> However, it can be said that Berridge also had a significant spiritual impact in the lives of both individuals by regularly offering his reflections on the Christian life and offering frank and forthright spiritual advice. On the death of Thornton's wife, Lucy, in 1785, Berridge wrote to his

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<sup>17</sup> John Thornton (1720-1790) was considered the second richest merchant in Europe. He was converted to evangelicalism in 1754 through the ministry of Henry Venn and Martin Madan. From this point onward, Thornton generously supported the work of evangelicalism throughout Britain and America. See Milton M. Klein, *An Amazing Grace: John Thornton and the Clapham Sect* (New Orleans, NO: University Press of the South, 2004). Berridge regularly received gifts from Thornton to support his ministry in Everton. In one letter, Berridge expressed appreciation for receiving six dozen Bibles and New Testaments and 200 devotional works from Thornton to help in evangelism "Letter to John Thornton, April 11, 1775" in Berridge, *Works*, 389. Selina, Countess of Huntingdon (1707-1791) embraced evangelicalism probably in 1739 through the influence of her sister-in-law, Lady Margaret Hastings. For more information on her life, see A. Seymour, *Life and Times of Selina Countess of Huntingdon*, Volumes 1 & 2 (London, 1839).

friend and acknowledged that her death would indeed make his house dreary, but encouraged him to trust in Jesus. "But when the rib is gone, you must lean firmer on your staff."<sup>18</sup> Berridge's relationship with Lady Huntingdon was a lively one. Throughout their lives, Berridge regularly offered her spiritual advice and never shirked from speaking plainly and forthrightly to her on a variety of matters. And yet, Berridge also cared deeply for her as demonstrated in his letters of comfort and advice when Lady Huntingdon's daughter had died.<sup>19</sup>

The skill to lead in a 360 degree manner has been underlined in a number of leadership books published in recent years.<sup>20</sup> Part of the calling of a pastor is to extend spiritual influence to all those whom God brings across one's path regardless of their station or position either within an organization (i.e. elders or board members) or within society in general (i.e. political and business leaders). To do this well is not easy. It requires a sense of "holy indifference" on the part of a pastor - that is, a willingness to live one's life before an audience of One and not with an eye to people-please or a desire for personal gain. These were qualities that Berridge exemplified brilliantly in his life and ministry and from which pastors today can certainly learn.

Correlated to this need to cultivate a sense of "holy indifference" is the eighth lesson which can be drawn from Berridge's life, namely, *not to take oneself too seriously*. As described above, Berridge's experience of a prolonged period of illness

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<sup>18</sup> Cited in Rev. Josiah Bull, *Memoirs of the Rev. William Bull* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1864), 119.

<sup>19</sup> See Chapter 9.

<sup>20</sup> See John Maxwell, *The 360 degree Leader: Developing your Influence from Anywhere in the Organization* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2005); Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2002); Robert Clinton, *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1992).

during the 1760s taught him that no life is indispensable before God. Berridge discovered that the work of ministry – which continued to flourish while Berridge was largely infirmed - was not dependent on his own contribution, but rather on God's complete sovereignty. As a result, Berridge seldom viewed his role in ministry with too much seriousness. While tirelessly working towards the propagation of the Gospel through faithful pastoral work, itinerancy, and the raising up of lay pastors, Berridge carried this work out with a keen awareness of his own dispensability.

Cultivating a similar sense of humility in ministry is absolutely crucial for Christians today. Whenever pastors begin to view their ministry vision, their experience of church growth, or their own specific ministry agenda as products of their own particular gifts and talents *even alongside* the sovereign work of God, they enter dangerous territory.<sup>21</sup> Too many churches today have risen and fallen because their vision and ministry plans were tied more to the personalities involved than to the work that God, in His sovereign Grace, was carrying out. Berridge learned to live out his days in the wonder and awe that God could use an “ass” as himself to carry out His sovereign work. Developing a similar sense in pastoral life today may in fact remove pressure from pastors who have developed an inordinate sense of self-importance and would offer the longed-for freedom that comes through simple, humble service.

As Berridge aged, he increasingly recognized the sovereign role God had played in his life and ministry. As a result, Berridge began to devote more time to prayer than to words, written or spoken. This lesson constitutes the ninth lesson drawn from his

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<sup>21</sup> For an excellent allegory describing these dynamics in pastoral ministry, see Walter Wangerin Jr., *The Book of Sorrows* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1985).

Berridge's life – *to minister effectively requires devotion to prayer*. In his sixty-third year, Berridge wrote to John Thornton and commented on the growth his church had been experiencing, "Crowded and attentive congregations are reviving sights; yet perhaps this is rather an age of much hearing, than much praying. The old puritan spirit of devotion is not kindling and breathing among us."

To Berridge, one of spiritual effects of growing old was an increasing desire not to write, nor to travel, but to simply pray. In 1783, Berridge writes to his friend, John Thornton, "The longer I live, the more need I see of the apostle's advice, to pray *always* with *all* prayer, not only the congregational and social, but riding prayer, walking prayer, reading prayer, writing prayer, in short prayer of every posture and exercise. We lose many a good bit and sup for want of asking, and often starve in the midst of plenty."<sup>22</sup> Two years later, Berridge reiterated this sentiment by contrasting the work of the later Methodists with that of Puritan piety from the previous century, "[Methodists] suckle the head without nourishing the heart. We shall never obtain the old puritan spirit of holiness till we obtain their spirit of prayer."<sup>23</sup>

The call to pray is a lesson that not only John Berridge teaches, but it is a lesson to be drawn from every devoted minister of the Gospel that is found in church history. In an information age where sermons, ministry ideas, and implementation plans are a mouse-click away and where an increasing emphasis is placed on specialization and the mastery of ministry techniques, Berridge's call to pray desperately needs to be heeded.

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<sup>22</sup> "Letter to John Thornton, January 23, 1783" in Berridge, *Works*, 409.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Charles Smythe, *Simeon and Church Order* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 182.

Berridge reminds us that to be a pastor is to be a pray-er and without prayer, little work can be done that will have any lasting value.<sup>24</sup>

The tenth and final lesson to be drawn from our study of the life and ministry of John Berridge is the lesson of *finishing well*. Studies have repeatedly shown that there are roughly 1500 pastors in North America who leave their churches each month due to burn-out, conflict or moral failure.<sup>25</sup> Berridge's life and ministry offer an example of an ordinary pastor living through extraordinary experiences only to settle into the rhythm of daily pastoral life. Sustained through friendships, an evangelical vision, and a deepening life of prayer, John Berridge's life presents not only an example for finishing well in ministry, but also the means by which longevity in ministry can be attained. Churches in the western world are in desperate need for pastors who do not approach ministry in careerist terms, but who live in obedient response to the One who calls, trusting that the same God who calls will provide all that is required to remain faithful in the calling until He calls one safely home.

### **Conclusion**

In 1793, God called the vicar of Everton safely home. It should not be surprising that Berridge's epitaph displays the same vein of humor and eccentricity that he displayed throughout his days in his correspondence, in his friendships, and in his preaching. It reads:

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<sup>24</sup> For an excellent treatment of the specialization of the pastorate and the need to return to prayer and contemplation, see Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989).

<sup>25</sup> Daniel Sherman, "Pastors Leaving Ministry," <http://www.pastorburnout.com/pastors-leaving.html> [Accessed December 27, 2011].



## AN EPITAPH

Of the Rev. John Berridge, M.A., late Vicar of Everton, written by himself, excepting the date of his death, as inscribed on the south side of a plain substantial tomb, about a yard high.

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HERE LIE  
The earthly remains of  
JOHN BERRIDGE  
Late Vicar of Everton,

And an itinerant Servant of Jesus Christ,  
Who loved his Master, and his work,  
And, after running on his errands many years,  
Was called up to wait on him above.

Reader,  
Art thou born again?  
No salvation without a New Birth!  
I was born in sin, February, 1716.  
Remained ignorant of my fallen state till 1730.  
Lived proudly on Faith and Works for Salvation  
Till 1754.

Admitted to Everton Vicarage, 1755.  
Fled to Jesus alone for refuge, 1756.<sup>26</sup>  
Fell asleep in Christ, January 22, 1793.<sup>27</sup>

Anglican Historian, John Overton offers this final observation regarding Berridge's epitaph. He comments, "It is a very characteristic example of the Evangelical way of looking at the religious life. There is no mention of Baptism or Confirmation as marking actual steps, but all is concentrated upon the consciousness of saving grace and the necessity of being born again."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> There is some confusion regarding the date of Berridge's conversion. His tomb reads 1756, yet the event most likely took place in December, 1757.

<sup>27</sup> Berridge, *Works*, lvii.

<sup>28</sup> Cited in Charles Smyth, *Simeon and Church Order* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 198.

This vision to receive God's saving grace and serve in response is captured well in the lines which Berridge wrote and pasted on the clock in his home:

Here my Master bids me stand  
And mark the time with faithful hand;  
What is his will is my delight,  
To tell the hours by day, by night.  
Master, be wise, and learn of me,  
To serve thy God, as I serve thee.<sup>29</sup>

It was this focus on God's sovereign grace and the inexpressible joy of knowing and being known by Him that sustained the life and ministry of the eccentric vicar of Everton. Having finally understood God's saving grace at the age of forty-one, Berridge made the most of his the time he had been given and for the remaining years of his life, he faithfully served his Master by preaching the same Gospel message that so transformed his own life. Like Berridge, we too are beneficiaries of God's amazing grace and can experience the joy of knowing and being known by our Saviour. The One who saves also calls us into a life of ministry faithfulness. Throughout this journey, we do not lose heart, for the One who calls neither leaves nor forsakes, but sustains to the end. And so in freedom, let us, as Berridge did before us, serve our Master all the days that we are given.

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<sup>29</sup> Berridge, *Works*, lvi.

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## **VITA**

David T. Wood (HBA, York University, Toronto, ON; MCS, Regent College, Vancouver, BC) was born on August 8, 1966 in Toronto, ON. He began his Doctoral work at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston, MA in 2009 and expects to graduate with a Doctor of Ministry degree in May, 2012. David serves as Senior Associate Pastor at Coquitlam Alliance Church in Coquitlam, BC, CANADA where he lives with his wife, Karen, and three children.